A Girl of the Blue Ridge

PAYNE ERSKINE

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A GIRL OF THE BLUE RIDGE

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Lury found comfort in the hollow of his arm.
FRONTISPIECE. *See Page* 211.

THE GIRL OF THE BLUE RIDGE

By PAYNE ERSKINE

AUTHOR OF

"The Mountain Girl," "The Eye of Dread,"
"Joyful Heatherby," Etc.

With Frontispiece by
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A GIRL OF THE BLUE RIDGE

CHAPTER I

B'AR WALLER

THE top of Old Abe mountain was covered with a cap of tumbled, white cloud, as if he had lifted his head sleepily from an uneasy bed. His aspect was blue and cold, and all up his rugged slopes the trees glistened and dripped, as if the very heavens had wept in the night. Old Abe is a wild, uncivilized mountain, deeply scarred with gorges, rock-bound and precipitous; uncivilized but not uninhabited, as paths winding along the steep sides, half hidden with rank shrubbery, would indicate.

Down one of these paths a mule was slowly descending, with a careful setting of her small hoofs among the rocks at each step, as is the way of the wise, cautious mules of the mountains. She was a sleek, well-fed, and altogether contented animal, and she might well be, for she was her rider's best friend; at least, the mountain people did not know of his having any other friend, and certainly no friend could be better treated than her rider treated her.

One sign of this friendship was that no matter how drunk her rider might be, the mule always took good care of him. If he reeled and leaned this way and that, the mule swayed her large body so as to keep him carefully

balanced; if he fell off, she stood patiently and waited while he struggled to mount again; or, if that were impossible, she browsed among the shrubs and awaited her master's pleasure. She had been known to wait thus all night long, stamping impatiently, but never leaving the sleeping man.

This morning her rider was not drunk. He sat his mule easily, with a lithe grace, yielding to each swing of the animal with a natural poise that was at the same time erect and nonchalant, as if the world and all that it contained were surmounted by him as certainly as was his mule, or the mountain path, or as Old Abe over-topped the low country, which he looked down upon from his cloud-capped eminence.

No sounds were to be heard but those of the wildwood — varied, interesting sounds, harmonious and pleasant. High overhead, an eagle swam in air as a fish swims in the deep, circling widely, far, far to the east, then coming back with a swoop, near to the mountain top and close to an overhanging rock that jutted out from the perpendicular face of the precipice and held a gnarled and twisted bundle of branches and sticks in its hollow, open to the sun and wind, yet sheltered by its own isolation and inaccessibility. That was the eagle's nest, and not far from it, separated from the world also by the barrier of isolation, was the home of the sleek mule's rider.

Daniel McEwen had always been a law unto himself. He asked odds of no one and sought the companionship of none. Wifeless and childless, he kept his own counsel; and his manner of quiet derision and unhostile aloofness, an easy, flattering kind of courtesy that disarmed enmity

yet betrayed nothing and held his neighbors at bay through their fear of ridicule, made him the object of their curious speculation. All his life he had been to them a sort of question mark. They regarded him with a fascinated awe, even while pretending to themselves and each other that they were indifferent to his strangeness. His cabin was out of their way. Seldom any one passed there, and never did they visit him; yet continually they argued among themselves as to his way of living and what he owned.

Some said he was rich and was afraid to be one of them, lest they learn how much he possessed and ask help from him in their poverty. Some said he had left a wife down in the low country and had come up to the mountain to get away from her, for some mysterious cause. Some said he had held a public trust and had made way with the funds and dared not return; and others said he did not belong to the low country at all but had been raised over "t'other side the mountain", and that because he had quarreled with his folks he had left his home and lived on the mountain top, where none of his family could get to him, just to spite them. These were only a few of the many rumors about him; but all inferred a history of great interest, could it only be known, and a secret reason for his lonely life.

Yet he came and went freely, avoiding no one, riding his well-fed mule over to the settlement at Cloud's Mill for his corn-meal each week, greeting every one he met with that curious, baffling smile, accompanied by a nod or a pleasant word in a voice that would touch a chord of interest in any listener. No one ever dared supplement the word

of greeting with a question concerning him or his affairs, no matter what curious thought might be trembling on their lips; and while they invariably looked back after him as they passed, he never turned his head but rode on, unconcerned about them, swaying to the motion of his mule, in and out among the shadows of the overhanging trees.

Rarely was he disturbed by any human interest other than those which his own affairs provided, but this morning, distinct and separate from all other noises, a plaintive wail came up to him — a lonely, weird little call, like nothing he had ever heard in that wild spot before. He reined in his mule and waited, his head lifted; only the song of a thrush in a laurel thicket, — only the early twittering of a family of yellow-hammers in a hollow tree near by; yet he could not be mistaken; there was a human note in that thread-like wail.

He still waited, making no sound. His mule stamped and pawed to go on. "Still, Bess," he whispered, and the beast obeyed. Thus quiet, as if cast in bronze, they waited, the rider and his mule, then suddenly, as if with a burst that could no longer be controlled, came a sound of sobbing, hysterical, unrestrained.

"Stand, Bess," he commanded, casting the rein over her neck, and with a bound he was off, striding down the hillside toward the spot whence the wail had seemed to come. As he went crashing through the thick underbrush, the sound of weeping ceased, but he held on, seemingly drawn by instinct to the right place. The crying was like that of a girl, yet what was a girl doing in "B'ar Waller", miles away from any cabin, at that early hour? Once within the memory of those still living at the settlement around

Cloud's Mill, a bear had been killed there, and it was fondly believed that bears were in the habit of going there to wallow in the hole that was certainly a convenient rolling-place for animals of some sort, whether wild or tame, in the shallows of the stream that was a mountain torrent whenever it rained and which was always a rapids, except for these pools, where it paused, seemingly, for intervals of rest.

Here he quickly found the weeping girl. He stood in silence for a moment, looking down on her and taking in her whole appearance, as if he were dazed by the forlorn spectacle. The look of derision disappeared from his face, and a quiver tugged at the corners of his mouth. His eyelids drooped, giving a look of peculiar softness to his expression. She sat on a large, mossy stone, cowering back in a small cavern of rock, as if she had crawled there to hide. Her face was swollen with crying, and her eyes still streamed with tears, although she no longer wept aloud but drew in short, sobbing breaths through her parted, red lips.

To her breast she hugged a bundle wrapped in an old, blue gingham apron, and she mechanically swayed her body back and forth, rocking it in her arms, while she gazed at Daniel with a frightened stare. Her feet were thrust into coarse shoes, which were covered with red clay, and she wore no stockings. Her bare legs were red and bleeding from the thorns and brambles through which she had scrambled. Her sleeves were torn, allowing her elbows to protrude through the rents, and her scant dress was too short and was ragged and badly mended.

For a long instant they waited thus, gazing straight into each other's eyes; then slowly Daniel McEwen dropped

on one knee close to her and touched the bundle of blue gingham with his finger.

"What ye got thar?" he said in a hushed voice. Her heart was beating with frightened thumps, so that he could see the rapid palpitation through her thin dress and in the pulse of her slender neck, yet she managed to utter the one word, her voice only a whisper:

"Baby."

"Won't ye 'low me to look at hit?" He spoke very gently. She hesitated.

"You won't — won't — tech 'im?"

"I never did hu't a creeter in my life — ef I knowed hit."

Reassured, she tremblingly laid the bundle on her knees and turned back the rag in which it was wrapped. There lay a naked, new-born baby, beautifully formed, its queer wrinkled little face working to utter a cry at being thus roused from sleep. Quickly she covered it and again rocked it in her arms, cooing to it softly, while the tears streamed afresh from her eyes.

"Whose babe be this'n?" His eyes gleamed as he looked at her again, appraising her size and probable age.

"He be mine."

His long fingers closed around her thin arm, and he felt it quiver under his touch. "Hu-come you by this babe?" he demanded, his eyes fixed on hers with hypnotic steadiness.

"He be mine. He be. Leave 'im be weth me. Oh, I reckon he'll die!"

"Tell me hu-come you by 'im," he demanded again, in the same low, steady voice.

"Maw done give 'im to me." She controlled herself

with a visible effort, then her words poured forth, mingled with hysterical sobs. "'Maw's dade — she's dade — lyin' thar still an' white, an' the' 's no box to put 'er in. I seed 'er lyin' so — Oh, Gawd, oh, Gawd! Wisht me an' baby could die an' lie thar weth 'er."

Daniel McEwen slowly relinquished her arm and stood with his back toward her; and his face worked like one perplexed and troubled, but his eyes were dry and hard. She talked on, as if the stream of her thoughts, like a mountain torrent, could not be stayed now that they had burst forth.

"Hit's awful to ouah place. They hain't nobody thar only paw an' Ellen, an' she be'n drinkin', and paw give hit to her, an' he be'n drinkin', too. Maw's dade — an' — an' — paw done hit. I seed 'im pull 'er up to git 'im somethin' to eat, and she died. I seed 'im. I wisht I hed a long, sharp knife like Jim's, an' I'd stick hit into paw's heart an' laugh whilst I war doin' hit. I'd go down to the still an' stick hit into 'im whilst he were lyin' thar drunk and laugh to do hit."

Fiercely she clasped the infant to her breast and swayed and lulled him, filled with the mother sense, even while her slight body was torn with her sobs at the remembrance of the horrors she had passed through. "Thar — thar — baby, sisteh won't 'low 'im tech you, thar. I seed her dyin'. She stood thar tryin' to stir up the co'n-meal fer bread, and she drapped whar she stood — jes' — dade. An' Jim put 'er on the bade, an' kivered 'er weth th' quilt, an' lit out — cussin'. I do' know whar he went — likely to fetch ol' woman Basle. He run an' said they was a raid on, an' the damned revenues was after us, so him an' Uncle Joe an'

paw had to hide the worm; an' jes' then maw drapped, an' Jim laid 'er on the bade, and ran out agin, cussin' like I said."

She drew the little bundle up, and hid her tear-stained face in the folds of blue gingham, and rocked and sobbed. Daniel turned again and looked down upon her; his eyes glittered, and his mouth twitched, as he placed his hand on her tangled head of yellow hair and softly stroked it.

"Be you Sally Cloud's leetle gal?" he asked. "Be yore name Sally?"

She shook her head. "Maw's name were Sally Cloud — fo' she were married. My name's jes' Lury. Lury Bab." She spoke without lifting her head.

Daniel McEwen's face looked as no man had ever seen it. The old derisive smile was gone, and his eyes seemed lighted from an inward fire, like those of a tortured soul, while his thin lips tightened and drew back from his perfect teeth as if with a snarl of hatred. His hand pressed harder on her head and tipped her face up toward his, and as he did so, his expression softened to one of infinite pity.

"Hu-come you way off here to B'ar Waller this time th' mawnin', Lury? Yore clothes is half off'n ye, an' nothin' on the child."

"Maw give 'im to me. She hedn't nothin' to put on 'im, an' ol' woman Basle said she'd bring 'im some clo's, but she hain't been thar no more, an' maw said, she said: 'You take 'im an' keer fer 'im, Lury. They hain't nobody else to keer fer 'im. Be good to 'im, Lury, he's yourn.' So he be mine — Oh, Gawd, he'll die, fer I hain't nothin' to give 'im to eat. Thar, honey, sisteh won't 'low 'im tech you," she moaned.

"Who be ye feared of."

"Paw. The' hain't nobody else to be feared of. I hearn 'im screech afteh us; Gawd, how I run — I be'n runnin' all night, seem like. I run here, fer I knowed ef he come here, the Lord would sen' b'ars to tear out his damned soul, ef he come nigh to hurt we-uns. I be more feared o' him than I be of a hunderd b'ars. Hell fieh'll be too good fer sich. My legs is all tore up weth th' briehs, an' I don't keer, ef only I hed suthin' fer to give 'im to eat, only he cain't eat. I snatched a rind o' bacon fat fer 'im to suck, but I done los' hit whilst I were runnin'! Oh, Gawd, he'll die," she wailed, as a weak little cry struggled out from the bundle.

"You quit cryin', Lury. I'll he'p ye, an' he'll not die. Come!"

He took the bundle from her clinging arms, loath to relinquish it, and lifted her from her seat. She rose stiffly, as if she were wearied to the limit of her strength. He half carried her along as they climbed the steep hillside back to the road, where the faithful mule waited; there Daniel McEwen allowed her to take her precious bundle again and lifted her up where no one had ever sat except himself. The mule shuddered a little and threatened to rebel, but he quieted her.

"She's only a leetle gal, Bess, like you be. You 'low her to set. Thar, easy now. Kin ye ride, sis?"

"I reckon, but ouah mule kicks. I kin ride 'er, though."

"Wall, you hold the babe, an' I'll tend to the mule. She's kind-hearted, when she knows what's wanted of 'er, but she's the devil to fuss when ye don't explain." He slipped his arm through the rein and walked up the road

down which he had been riding half an hour before. Bess followed docilely enough, and Lury, wondering yet comforted, held her bundle to her breast and sat easily on the man's saddle. Evidently she was used to riding the mule that kicked.

Now and then the babe wailed its pitiful, little cry, and Lury patted it and cooed to it, as if her tenderness could save it. She watched furtively lest the man leading the mule should be angry with the whimpering child. He did not look back, seemingly wrapped in his own thoughts; but once, when her voice went broken and quivering in her anguished efforts to quiet the little one, he glanced at her and smiled and spoke comfortingly.

"Leave 'im cry," he said; "I reckon hit comes natchel to a babe to cry. They allus do hit, an' hit shows he's livin'."

"Be you goin' to yore home?" she asked.

"I reckon so. The's no otheh place I kin take ye."

"Will yore ol' woman 'low ye to fetch me to yore house?"

"The's no ol' woman thar to botheh ye. Never ye fret."

"Be you livin' all alone?"

"Not e'zakly so; thar's Josephine." The derisive smile broke over his face and passed.

"Be she kin to you?"

"Not e'zakly. She be the cow."

"Oh! Be you —" She dropped her voice as if she feared she might be overheard. "Be you Dan'l M'Cune?" she asked, pronouncing the name as it was pronounced by all his neighbors on the hills.

"That's my name. Be ye feared to speak hit?"

"Naw. Hit's jes' ouah way, maw's an' mine. When she spoke yore name, she spoke hit sof' like, and paw say ef she say that name, he shore would kill 'er. He neveh say what fer, an' she neveh say what fer, an' so I neveh heered why he say hit. I 'lowed 'twas on'y his natchel meanness."

"I reckon so," said the man and strode on, lost in his own thoughts.

The road they were traveling had been an old coach line, winding over the mountains from the valleys of the interior to the towns lying on the plains extending to the sea. In the old days, it had been well kept and much traveled, being the only highway, but since the invasion of the mountains by railways, enterprise, and steam, it had been used only by the dwellers of the hills, and as a wagon way had become, in some places, almost impassable. Little use have the mountaineers for wheeled vehicles, when on foot or in the saddle they may take the short cuts, thread their way among the timber and underbrush, and scramble among rocks and over them with a wayward and primitive directness.

By the time they reached the highest point of the ridge, the sun had risen on the mountain, and they looked down on the settlement around Cloud's Mill, still sleeping in the purple shadows. Half-way up the side of Old Abe drifted lazy clouds like huge puffs of down, now lighted with the rose tints of the wonderful mountain dawn. In the night the rain had fallen, adding to the difficulty of Lury's flight from her home in the gorge, making the paths slippery with mud and hard to find in the darkness. Now the warm sun dried her scant clothing and warmed her through. Already the labor and terror of the night were becoming things of the

past, and with the instinct of youth, she began to hope and to look forward to her next move in the game of life, — what she should do, and how she should play it.

They turned off from the old highway and took a narrower path, a mule trail very winding and having steep ascents and descents, and crossing a rapid little stream of clear cold water singing its way down to the little river that turned Cloud's Mill, which ground their grain for the people of the hills and also crushed their corn for their sour mash whiskey. Thus winding and turning, their general course was still upward. Here the vegetation was backward because of the altitude; and the flaming azalea was still in bloom, while in the valley the beautiful blossoms had long since slid down their long pistils and dropped off.

Held in Lury's careful arms and lulled by the swaying of the mule, the babe had ceased wailing by the time they reached the clearing where Daniel McEwen's log cabin stood, completely surrounded by a crooked rail fence, with no bars or gate. Here he dropped the reins and lifted her off in his arms, babe and all, and set her over the fence easily and lightly. She seemed so little when he had her in his arms, the poor little waif — so small and helpless — and when she fixed her eyes on his, childishly old and elflike, the spirit behind them seemed to be struggling for self-expression and to be putting into a look more than might be expressed in words; the very soul of her looking intently through those limpid, clear brown depths into his soul and holding him.

"Go right in thar, an' I'll foller ye in a minute. No, the's nobody thar. You hain't afeared, be ye?"

"I hain't afeared o' nothin' 'ceptin' he mount die. Oh,

I'm skeered." The tiny mortal slightly moved in her arms, and a feeble wail answered her.

"Thar, now, long's he kin cry, he's not dyin'. Stand, Bess," he called to the mule, then picking Lury up again, he carried her into the cabin and laid her on his bed. "Lie still, thar, an' don't hold the pore leetle feller too clost. Ye're like to smother 'im. I'll be back in a minute."

She obeyed him through sheer exhaustion and lay staring around the clean, bare room, watching his every movement in a way that reminded him of a wounded deer.

Ranged on a small table contrived by a board swung to the wall by leather hinges and held up by a leg also hinged to the wall were a few dishes, a very few, all clean and orderly. He selected a cup and left the room. "Leave 'im cry, an' lie still till I come," he commanded, and she obeyed him.

Soon he returned with a cup of warm milk. "Now we'll see ef the leetle un has right good sense, fer ef he has, he'll know what to do."

He fumbled around on some shelves in the corner and brought forth an old piece of linen from which he tore off enough to serve his purpose. This he folded and tied in a soft little wad and dipped into the milk.

"Thar, now — le' me take the leetle feller. So."

The man's long arms seemed to adapt themselves to their unusual task as if it were a customary thing for him to tend on infancy. As he lifted the wee morsel in its blue gingham wrapping, almost might one of his large, slender hands, curved cuplike, hold it. Lury slipped from the bed and stood beside him, watching eagerly, but not so eagerly as the babe, feeling the warm milk pressed against his lips, sucked at the

rag — sucked and sucked — and then straightened his little, naked body in anger when it was removed to be dipped again in the cup.

"He war perishin' fer hunger," said Lury, kneeling down and holding one of the tiny little hands. "My Gawd! Hain't he sof' an' weenty! You reckon at he'll eveh grow big as you be?"

"I reckon I wa'n't no mo' than what he be oncet. He has right good sense, too. Now watch him; how mad he gits when I take hit f'om 'im. He hain't goin' to 'low this to git away f'om 'im, be ye, sonny?"

Thus the two, the proud, self-sufficient man of the mountain, who recognized no being on earth higher than himself, living to himself and for himself, asking odds of none, gifted with some strange inheritance of *savoir faire* which would have graced a king's courtier or even the king himself, and coupling with that gift the true nobleman's inherent sense of "*noblesse oblige*"; ignorant, it is true, yet schooled by the hills and the sky, and the sweet, natural world all about him to a singular understanding of freedom and law; of orderliness despite apparent disorder; knowing the true coherence of all the created things around him, so that now, untaught, he knew how to hold and feed this little, starving, naked, human thing, and found the sympathy stirred in his soul sweet to feel; this man and the child-woman, soiled and ragged and pinched and worn, kneeling at his feet and feeling of the baby's little hand, smiling to find it soft, — these two were each, unknown to themselves, touching the hem of the Savior's robe and finding the contact thrilling and sweet.

Daniel McEwen looked at the girl's face, the tears

scarcely dry on her long lashes, as she knelt there, tenderly covering the bare limbs of the babe with the old apron in which she had wrapped him and smiling to see him take the rag from which he sucked the milk in his tiny fist and cling to it.

"An' he so leetle he don't know nothin' an' can hol' on like that-a-way. 'Pears like he's not goin' to die ef I kin make out to get 'im some clo's and somethin' to feed 'im. I kin get money sometimes, ef —" She stopped and caught her breath, as if she had said something she regretted.

"You kin! Then you be peart. How kin ye git hit?"

She said no more, but glanced up sidewise with a look of veiled secretiveness very unlike the open gaze of sorrow and fear with which her eyes had fixed themselves on his there in Bear Wallow. He noted the change and the firm set of her lips, and forbore to press the point, though curious as to her meaning.

"Thar, now he's fallin' asleep, 'cause he's satisfied. See, his leetle fingers is leavin' go the rag. So, so, thar, sof' now. We'll lay him on the bade an' leave 'im sleep a while, an' likely you wouldn't mind havin' a bite to eat yerself. I'll fin' out ef thar's somethin' lef' — leetle corn bread or sich."

Very gently the babe was laid on the bed, and Lury watched with hungry eyes as her rescuer moved about his clean, bare premises and placed a cake of corn bread on the table and a jug of molasses. He set a plate before her and poured molasses generously upon it.

"Thar, you jes' sop yer bread in that."

She was famished, but had thought nothing of herself until the food was before her, when she seized upon it as

eagerly as the babe had taken his milk and quite as primitively. She sopped the bread and sucked the molasses from it and ate like one who had always been indifferent to knives and forks. The man sat on his door-step and lighted his pipe and smoked and thought. He lifted his eyes to the sky and watched the eagle coming back with a long, sweeping circle to her nest in the hollow of the jutting rock. She had something in her claws — some small animal — he could not descry what.

"Hit's the way things is," he said to himself. "Hit looks mean, but the leetle creeter would be boun' to die some way — an' the ol' bird has to feed them as is dependent on 'er — them leetle birds stretchin' up their hades tow'ds 'er, now — thar! How they grab at hit!"

From where he sat, the ledge and the nest were easily seen, and he would not have shot the birds for a goodly sum in gold. These creatures in this wild, lonely spot were like companions to the solitary man. For years they had had their nest on that crag, and he had watched them in their daily flight. From time to time he glanced behind him into his cabin. His mind was on the child and his perplexity as to what he must do with her.

Presently he rose and entered, knocking the ashes from his pipe against the door frame as he walked in. Having wiped the last bit of the molasses from the plate, leaving it clean, Lury was picking up the crumbs from her lap and the table around the plate. Never had he known his corn bread to disappear so neatly and so completely. He handed her a tin dipper.

"I reckon ye mount be wantin' a drink," he said. "You'll find some water I jes' drawed in the bucket."

She took it silently and went out to the well and drank deeply of the cold, clear water. He had laid a towel over the curb. She looked down at her soiled hands and knew what he would have her do, and proceeded quickly to wash her hands and tear-stained face. Then she slipped her feet out of her muddy shoes and likewise washed her scratched and bleeding legs and blistered feet, and leaving the shoes at the well, returned barefooted and slid into the cabin with a shy glance up at him that was at once pretty and unexpected.

As she stood before him, digging one toe into a knothole in the floor, he regarded her earnestly, apart from his interest in the babe. When she again raised her eyes to his, he stooped and looked steadily into them, then moved by what feeling he did not know, he seated himself on his one chair, and taking her by the arm, pulled her to his side.

"Thar, now we'll talk a leetle. How old be ye?"

"Fo'teen."

He started and looked at her earnestly again. "Ye reckon so?"

"Maw say I be fo'teen, las' month, an' I be fo'teen."

"Of co'se yore maw knows, but ef you had said ten, I'd 'a believed ye. Now you tell me ev'y thing about hit. I'll neveh do you a hurt, no, not for nothin' on earth. Jes' think back an' tell me ev'y thing ye kin remember and ev'y thing ye know."

She stood silent for a moment, trying to bring her mind to respond to his wish, but as she thought of the night that had just passed, all else left her, and sobbing, she sank to the floor at his side. Her tears flowed afresh as she rocked

back and forth, her arms over her eyes, and her elbows protruding through her torn sleeves. He waited a little, leaning over her with his elbows on his knees and his brows drawn in perplexity; then he placed his hand on her head and turned her face up to his, as before.

"What made ye run away so far?"

"Paw said he'd kill the baby an' me, too. I seed 'im go out fer the ax, an' I run — Gawd, how I run!"

"He were drunk, I reckon."

"He's awful bad when he's drunk."

"I reckon so."

"An' maw's dade — oh, oh! she's dade. I seed 'er lyin' thar so still an' white! I'm skeered to go home. I'm skeered I'll see 'er again, an' they hain't no box to put 'er in — she's jes' lyin' thar. Oh, Gawd! oh, Gawd! I hain't no place to go; I'm skeered to go home —"

"Hush, Lury, listen at me. I hain't goin' to 'low no human bein' tech ye nor hurt ye, nor baby, neither. Be ye hearkin'? I'm goin' down the mountain, to take my co'n to Cloud's Mill, an' you bide here ontwel I come back. You'll be a heap safer here than you'd be at B'ar Waller settin' on a stone, let alone havin' milk fer the babe."

A singular beauty crept into her face, the same wild, haggard beauty he had recognized when he found her. She seized his hand and pressed it to her tear-wet cheek, then clasped it to her breast in an abandon of passionate response to his kindness. His face turned crimson under the brown tan, although he did not draw his hand away but allowed it to lie passively in her grasp, with a delicate comprehension of her nature; knowing that to seem to give her the slightest rebuff would silence her and keep

her from unlocking her heart to him, as he was determined she should do. He knew well that she had the art of concealment, learned by experience, but he rightly judged that it was not inherent, and that she would be frank by nature when she dared. He felt instinctively how her starved soul hungered for love. He had not lived a solitary man for nothing.

"Will ye bide here an' not run away ag'in?"

"I'll do whateveh you tell me," she sobbed.

"Then I tell ye to bide here a bit. Can ye milk?" She nodded. "Good! I'll take ye out an' make ye 'quainted with Josephine. When yore baby wakes up, you leave him cry a leetle, while you go out an' milk half a cup of warm milk fer 'im, an' give hit to 'im like I showed ye. Then ef he cries fer mo', give 'im a leetle wateh, an' make 'im hush jes' that-a-way. Don't give 'im no mo'n what I tell ye. I hevn't raised calves fer nothin'. I've raised baby pigs that-a-way, too, when they come pindlin', an' puppies, too. I reckon a sound leetle human hain't so turrible dif'unt."

Again she nodded, still clasping his hand and caressing it.

"Now as fer you — kin ye make co'n bread?"

"I reckon."

"So? Then they's meal an' salt an' fixin's yandah on the shelf, an' meat, too, if ye like to fry a leetle; an' they's matches fer lightin' a fiah, an' kindlin' outside the do'. Be ye shore ye kin do fer yerse'f, or shall I cook a leetle fer ye 'fore I leave? Ye hain't bigger'n a skeeter."

"I kin cook. Maw teached me. She hed to, fer Ellen's mostly porely an' pow'ful weak with a hurtin' in 'er side."

"Who's Ellen?"

"She's Jim's wife. Jim's my uncle or cousin — I cain't

rightly say which — on'y he be's kin to we-uns, maw say."

"I reckon he's Jim Furman. The Furmans is kin to the Babs. You'll be safe here. Ol' Abe'll take keer of ye."

"Who be he?"

"He be th' mountain. He takes keer o' me — don't ye reckon? Now you leave go my han', leetle sis, fer I must git off. I reckon I'll go roun' by yore place, an' you tell me — quit cryin' — tell me hain't they nobody thar you like to sen' some word to?"

"They hain't nobody but Dave, an' he's not thar. He went oveh t' otheh side the mountain with a load, an' he won't be back fo' two days. Ef he hed been thar, they wouldn't nothin' hev happened, fer he'd 'a' kilt paw 'fo' he'd low'd him tech maw er me. He done tol' me he'd kill paw some day, an' I reckon he will."

"He be Dave Turpin, I reckon. Be he kin to you-uns?"

"No, he jes' live thar. He hev no kin. I hearn ol' woman Basle say he hev' no kin, fer he were a love chil'."

"I reckon so." The old, derisive smile played about his lips.

"I wisht I were sich, fer my kin's awful mean to me, all 'cept maw, an' now she's dade." Again her tears flowed, but he hastened to turn her thoughts.

"Come along out here, an' I'll make ye acquainted with Josephine," he said.

He bent over the bed and looked again at the sleeping infant lying there pitifully naked but for the old apron, and a certain womanly instinct natural to men of finest quality and to the manliest, stirred within him and taught him

what to do. He stooped and drew a large box out from under the bed, and took from it a soft old sheet of mountain homespun, coarse and heavy, but of loose weave and not by any means harsh to the touch. This he tore across and across, making four large squares. Then he fumbled in the box and pulled from the bottom a worn patchwork quilt, which he spread out on the floor, and with his big hasp knife he cut it across in the same way.

"This'll serve the babe ontwel ye kin git some of that money ye was speakin' about. Here's whar I do my hand sewin'. I be beholden to nobody on this earth, not even a woman, to do my leetle jobs. I does 'em myse'f, or they neveh do be done." He lifted a cover from a box beside the table and took therefrom a little mountain basket, woven in the melon pattern and shape peculiar to the hills, wherein were great needles and coarse thread and fine cotton yarn in balls.

"You jes' set here an' sew the aidge o' these pieces what I've cut off, oveh an' oveh, so the cotton won't come out, like that-a-way. Then you wrop 'im in them sof' ol' sheet pieces and lay these here ol' quilts oveh 'im an' round 'im, an' I reckon he'll do well ontwel ye kin make out to git aholt o' some o' that money ye was tellin' ye could git." He glanced at her as he again referred to it, and saw the same secretive look between narrowed lids, glinting through her beautifully curved lashes as she furtively looked, not at him but past him.

"Afteh ye have 'im wropped in them clean pieces, ye mount wash what he has on 'im now thar in the trough by the well, an' ye'll fin' the soap yandah on the winder-sill. Ye may need hit, 'thout ye kin git that thar money quick,

fer he's goin' to grow pow'ful when he gits started oncet. Calves an' pigs is that-a-way."

"He ain't no calf nor no pig. He's a human."

"I reckon so. Well, how about that money, anyway? You tell me hu-come you git hit, an' you tell me quick." He turned on her with such sternness that she shrank back quivering, but her lips only closed tightly.

Again he tried gentleness. "Do Dave give hit to ye — fer —"

"Dave do' know nothin' 'bouts hit."

"Who do ye git hit f'om?"

"I do' know."

"Jes' — anybody what comes along? Do you git hit from sich?" Into his eyes had crept a sadness along with the sternness, and she looked in his face and saw something that caused her to cease quivering and speak frankly.

"They is nobody on earth knows how I come by hit, but I done got five dollahs hid, er mo'n five, an' I cain' spen' hit, 'thout they take hit from me an' lick me fer gettin' hit. I 'lowed I'd wait ontwel I could git a lot, an' then I'd steal maw off on the railroad an' we'd neveh come back, an' now maw's dade." Again she cried out her pitiful wail.

"Thar, now you hush, an' come with me. We'll git 'quainted with Josephine," which at last they did, stroking the cow's smooth sides and giving her tufts of long grass, as she stood gazing at them over the crooked rail fence at the back of the cabin, closing and opening her great soft eyes, and slowly chewing her cud.

"This here's Lury, Josephine. She wants a leetle milk fer the babe oncet in a while, an' you give hit to 'er when she come fer hit, will ye? See 'er how she's lookin' at ye,

jes' as kind an' gentle. You stroke 'er along the side, so, an' she'll let ye git the milk stiddy an' quiet."

Lury put her arms around Josephine's neck and stroked and petted her, and Daniel McEwen walked off toward the mule, smiling his old smile and communing with himself. Then Lury went back to the cabin and stood in the doorway looking after him. He waved his hand to her.

"Bide right thar ontwel I come back, an' don't ye be skeered o' nothin', fer they hain't nothin' to hurt ye nigh my place," he called to her.

CHAPTER II

THE RHODODENDRON FLOWER

DANIEL MCEWEN descended the mountain, but not by the way he had set out in the early dawn of that day. He kept to the old coach road but a short distance; then, where an enormous chestnut tree had fallen, almost blocking the way — a tree which had lain thus undisturbed for twenty years and was like to lie thus, gradually returning to its native soil, for twenty years longer — he guided Bess around a mass of rhododendron that quite concealed a narrow track beyond its impenetrable barrier. The trail he took wound almost parallel with the road, but below it, for a long distance, then began a more sudden descent, skirting the steep sides of a gorge that was so narrow and so shut in by giant trees of balsam and spruce-pine, or hemlock, and so secluded and wild, that only bear and wild-cat were supposed to penetrate its depths.

A mountain stream tumbled and foamed over the rocks at its bottom, rushing on as it had been doing for ages, cutting its channel deeper and tearing continually at its walls like some undying spirit eternally chained in and eternally struggling to break loose, yet grown used to its fetters until it had learned to find a certain joy in the strife and in its own mad power. Therefore it took its way singing as it leaped and swirled and laughed in the sunlight that sifted down through over-arching boughs, as who should say: "Oh, you trees who tower above me and look

down upon my prison, I am less bound than you, for you are chained to the earth and must one day return to feed other trees with your own decay, while I shall yet be free, to rise and float above you and to descend upon you from the heavens. I, who seem to be chained and to forever descend, shall yet be free as the wind that sings in your tops; while you, who seem to be forever ascending, shall fall low and know the song of the winds no more. Therefore will I in pity fling out to you my sparkling drops to feed and water your roots, lest you famish where you stand and die before your time."

Gradually descending, Bess kept her careful way, planting her small hoofs between the rocks and feeling in the soft clay for firm foothold before trusting herself to the yielding surface. Her rider sat easily, one with her in every supple movement, bending beneath low-hung boughs and leaning toward every sharp curve, yet apparently oblivious of her and all about him, as if long habit had made him so familiar with the way as to enable him to ride through its labyrinth unseeing. Riding thus, absorbed in his thoughts and lost to all but some inward vision, his face assumed a look of gravity, and with it an unusual beauty.

Although he was going deeper and deeper into the gorge, he was not descending greatly; it was the hills on either side which were rising higher the farther he penetrated among them; and now he came upon a place that seemed to be a sort of pocket, a widening of the gorge itself, where there was room for level patches of corn on one side or the other of the stream. Here he guided his mule across to the farther side of the little river and allowed her to swing her nose in the clear, cold water.

As he sat, he lifted his eyes to an enormous rhododendron that hung over the stream, spreading its great clusters of splendid white blossoms only faintly touched with pink, out to the light. Here the sun might touch the blossoms only a part of each day, and for the rest they bloomed alone in the shade, making beauty in the wilderness for the joy of the Creator and for any lover of solitude and nature.

He reached up and carefully broke off a cluster that hung near, invitingly fragrant and perfect, and turned it about, looking at the velvety under side of the stiff leaves that bulwarked its delicacy about, and into the heart of each flower, out of which came the fine, threadlike filaments and the fairy wands of stamens and pistils, dusted at their tips with the wonderful life germs of pollen.

"Now look thar — how that thar's made. They hain't a human livin' 'at could make a thing the like o' that. Hit's like she were oncet, an' now she be'n done to death. Come up, Bess." The mule looked around at him, the clear water dripping from her sensitive nose. She stretched out her head and fumbled with her lips at the beech leaves drooping over her. "Ye hev to move on, Bess."

He turned her up the stream a short distance and then climbed the steep bank, following the windings of the stream a little farther, then took a path that led him into a cove which seemed like a branch of the gorge he had been traversing. Here were signs of human habitation in the form of a few old, moss-covered apple-trees grown thick with sucker shoots. A few small, green apples were already formed on them, which Bess tried to nibble as she passed. There, under a giant blackheart cherry-tree, he tied her and walked on.

She turned her head, nickering after him. "Stand, Bess. I'm comin' back to ye."

A great granite rock loomed high above him, making the cabin on the other side of it look smaller than it really was. The cabin indeed was a large one, with log additions that had been built from time to time in a rambling way, as if they had grown of themselves out of the parent cabin without human aid. It was a haphazard sort of habitation, and weeds were growing all about as if it were a home that had been long deserted, yet paths showing frequent use led this way and that away from the door.

He took one of these paths, and a hog wallowing behind a shrub under the bank jumped out with a startled grunt and scuttled off among the laurel. Beyond the house, as wild as the jungle fowl from which they sprang, a few pheasant-like chickens, rich red and golden brown in color, cackled and fluttered away at his approach. The window spaces were unglazed, and their shutters hung wide open; the door also was open, and an old dog, neither mastiff, shepherd, nor hound, yet hinting somewhat of each, crept out from under the house and slowly drew near, regarding him intently and sniffing at his legs.

Daniel McEwen stooped and patted his head. "Pore beast critter, be ye mo'nin' fer her?" he said and entered the cabin, — then stopped and drew in a long breath through lips that trembled.

The chimney-place loomed black and empty before him, and unwashed cooking utensils of the simplest, all cold and covered with grease, with half eaten scraps still in them, lay about in the ashes as they had been used. The dog sniffed at them as if even he found their contents unpala-

table, then turned and walked out in the sunshine, and again crawled under the cabin, where he lay whining.

On an old, four-poster mahogany bed in the corner, a splendid waif out of the dim past, much scratched and marred, under a homespun counterpane that had once been white, lay a wasted form, long and so slight as scarcely to lift the covering above the level of the bed. Soft, pale brown hair waved back from the waxen face, just as it had fallen, not as if arranged by any careful hand, leaving the brow bared. It was a broad, smooth brow, looking in death as if it had not suffered, but about the mouth were lines of sorrow deeply traced. In another corner of the large room was another bed, a rude, home-made affair, on which lay a dark-haired, low-browed woman in a state of unconsciousness and complete abandon. One foot hung over the edge of the bed, and the unlaced shoe had dropped from it to the floor. One arm was thrown over her head, and the ragged, brown calico sleeves had slipped back to her shoulder, leaving it bare. Her dress was open at the breast, and a babe, apparently a year old, lay at her side also heavily sleeping, evidently having crawled there and taken unbidden his natural sustenance and then rolled back in a half-drugged sleep.

Daniel McEwen stood there, taking in every wretched detail; the rickety, splint-bottomed chairs of mountain make, each holding its burden of ragged, unwashed clothing; the pair of black trousers on the floor, the "galluses" attached; and on the foot of the drunken woman's bed, the black coat lying as it had been thrown, the post protruding through a hole in the sleeve. Great footprints of heavy boots loaded with red mud crossed the floor to the fireplace

and back, and smaller prints of a man's long, bare foot also stained the floor, as if it had walked through soft, red clay; and the tracks of hounds, were here, there, and everywhere over the worn, uneven boards.

For a long, dazed moment his eyes roved over the place, instinctively avoiding the mahogany bed in the far corner; then with light, stealthy steps he crossed the floor as if the dead might be wakened too rudely and stood beside it. The thin eyelids with their long, brown lashes were only partly closed. He gently pressed his finger upon them and touched the waving, pale brown hair. It held no streak of gray, and was soft as the finest floss.

"Pore leetle gal, pore leetle gal, they done ye to death at las'," he murmured.

He still held the rhododendron flower in his hand, and he looked from the dead face to it and again at the face. Now, like chiseled, yellowed marble, it held in its perfect lines a singular and fascinating beauty and what it might have been in happy days, when the parted lips smiled, and the eyes opened and glowed with light from the soul; what marvelous charm might lie in the delicate skin tinted with the roses of health could only be dreamed of, but certainly the face, as well as the mahogany bed where the wasted form lay, was a waif from the past, a jewel that had lost its setting.

"I reckon I best leave 'the dead bury ther dead'; but she wern't never theirn, nohow." He straightened his tall form and looked through the open window space to the top of Old Abe, blue as sapphire after the night's rain. "Leastways, she's not here, an' she mount be up thar." He moved toward the door, then glancing again at the flower in his

hand, he stepped softly back to the bedside and laid it on the dead woman's breast.

The lean old mongrel, still whining and whimpering, crept out from under the house and followed at his heels until he mounted his mule and rode away, but this time he did not notice it, nor stoop to pat its head.

CHAPTER III

THE MEETING

THE village around Cloud's Mill was called "The Settlement." It had no other name. The little frame houses and cabins were scattered about in a hit-or-miss way, as if they had been thrown down by some giant hand, as corn is scattered to fowls, falling where they might on hillock, knoll, or hollow, or hanging on to steep ledges. They all had lodged in such fashion as to be able to look over at, or down upon, or up to each other, as the case might be.

Thus every one in the village could see almost into his neighbors' doors, or windows, if they had them, and know all about their goings and comings, their visitings and gossipings, their courtings or snubbings, their quarrelings and janglings; whatever, in fact, interested one, interested all, and all knew the affairs of each, in such a way as to make the place exactly what it was called — "The Settlement" — a little community so bound up in themselves and their own hillsides that to them there was no large, outside world, and no other interests, and no need for any.

In the Settlement was neither school nor church. Very few of the settlers could either read or write, and those few were regarded by their neighbors with more or less covert suspicion. Yet a curiosity about human affairs caused the men to gather around the one or two who took a weekly county paper, when the paper arrived at the Settlement

post-office and store, to listen to such bits as the solons could extract by slow reading and dole out to them.

Whatever necessities of life they could not raise, or make, or do without, they obtained by an occasional trip to the nearer towns in the low country, in their long, canvas-covered wagons, drawn by slow-going oxen or by mule team. In these wagons they carried various mountain products for sale or barter; anything from a patchwork quilt to a jug of corn whisky, — hidden among the fodder for their team, — or a side of pork or quarter of mutton, or baskets of splint or willow, or wooden spoons and bowls rudely shaped by jackknife and chisel.

Not all had a means of conveyance for these trips, hence those who had, when they were minded to go down the mountain, would carry for their neighbors, gathering along their route here a peck of onions, there a few eggs or a chicken, a sack of potatoes, or a watermelon, or even a few yards of cotton, homespun toweling, or a hank of woollen yarn. Seldom were these trips made regularly or at stated intervals, but that was not necessary when every family in the Settlement knew when the team was being "hooked up", and the fodder being placed in the wagon.

Never was the trip made in a day and back; sometimes even three or four days would be consumed in the slow progress, as the traveler stopped to exchange news at each home and gossip with every acquaintance on the road. So at night-fall, near some stream or spring by the roadside, the wagon would stop, the team be "unhooked", led to water, and fed, a fire lighted close by, and supper prepared over it. Then the man would creep under his patchwork quilt and sleep on the fodder in the wagon. Often the whole

family would be along, and sometimes a father would take one of his little sons for company.

The Settlement was a regular stopping-place for such wagons, and the one primitive store and post-office combined depended on them to bring up its supplies, — such necessities as tobacco and snuff and coffee, brown sugar, and molasses, and patent medicines, liniments, salves, and bitters. Then there were the things women needed. They no longer spun the warp for their weaving but bought it on large reels. It saved them a world of labor and gave them more time to sit in their cabin doors with their snuff-sticks in their mouths, and gossip.

It was about the noon hour of the same day that Daniel McEwen had found Lury Bab in B'ar Waller that he entered the store and stepped behind the counter where the case of post-boxes were and took out his paper. He was one of those who was able to read, and he never failed to come for the *County News.* He folded and refolded the paper until he had made it into a small wad, which he placed in his hip pocket; then he selected tobacco, one or two large twists which it was his habit to crush into his pipe, or chew if he preferred. Sauntering through the store, he looked into a cracker box which stood back of the scales and found it empty.

"What's 'come of yore cob pipes?" he asked. It was the first word he had spoken since he had entered.

Comp Ross, the storekeeper and postman, looked up from under bushy, red eyebrows, wrinkling his forehead across in deep creases and drawing his heavy, overhanging thatch of russet hair forward with a peculiar jerk as he did so.

"Them's done be'n tuk. I hain't hed no chanct fer to git up any mo', for the' 's be'n sech a row goin' on bout's th' raiders. Hain't nobody what dars to go down th' mountain, I reckon." He leaned over a woman who was standing before him fingering a bolt of red calico and asked the professional question of merchants the world over, without which no purchase is ever made. "Nothin' else, mam?"

The woman glanced sidewise at Daniel, concluded there was more she would like to consider, and asked for blue calico in the place of the red. "Ef ye got any blue 'at'll wash, I'll best look at hit," she said.

Ross turned to take out a bolt of blue cotton, and the woman leaned against the counter and watched McEwen, who still searched among the empty boxes and half-filled barrels in the back of the store.

"Be they anythin' pertic'lar ye mount be lookin' fer, M'Cune?" said Ross with friendly intonation.

"I be lookin' fer a skunk trap, an' I reckon I'd like to git a *blue* one, ef ye hev sich," was the slowly drawled reply.

The woman frowned and turned again to the much whittled counter and fingered the blue calico, holding it up to the light and chewing at a corner to see if the color would run, while Daniel McEwen sauntered to the door and stood there looking out.

"I be'n lookin' fer Dave Turpin along to-day or to-morrer. He said he'd fetch me up some o' them thar pipes. They was a couple o' fellers along lookin' out whar to make th' new road. Ef ye look in yore papeh, ye mount fin' somethin' in hit 'bouts what they is doin', don't ye guess?

They done tuk the las' cob pipe I hed, an' I mus' 'a' hed a dozen, I reckon."

"Yandah be Dave, pullin' up th' las' rise, an' his mules lookin' like they hed gone fer enough."

"I hain't through yit," said the woman, as Ross started for the door, "an' I be turr'ble driv. I got to git a few molasses."

"Whar's yer bucket?" asked Ross irritably.

"I done forgot to bring hit. Hain't ye got a ol' grease bucket or somethin' what ye c'n loan me? I mus' hev the 'lasses." She leaned heavily on the counter and looked loweringly at McEwen's back.

"How many ye want?" asked Ross, as he hunted behind the counter. "Here be a gallon jug. Hit's be'n used fer licker, but that won't hurt the 'lasses none."

"Wall, ye mount 'low me to take hit. I want quite a few, an' I'll fetch hit back to-morrer, likely."

Then came the clug-clug of the molasses as it flowed thickly into the jug, and presently the woman went away. Passing McEwen, she did not look up and only nodded at his pleasant "Good day, mam." But as she took her crooked path to her cabin in a hollow lower down, she glanced back at his imperturbable profile outlined against the dark interior of the store.

"Wall, he be quare," she said.

Now the canvas-covered wagon which McEwen had spied drew slowly up and stopped under a monstrous white oak that stretched its great, twisted branches over the store and the road and the wide square of hard, bare earth in front.

"Howdy, Dave," said Daniel, and Dave responded "Howdy, M'Cune," looking out from under the arching

hood of the wagon and peering around, up and down the empty village street.

"Howdy, Dave," said Ross, slouching out to him. "Any news?"

"Wall, I reckon so. Listen here. The's a lot o' rev'nues 'at's goin' to make a clean-up in Dark Corner this night. I reckon Bab an' the hull darn crew'll be ketched this time, an' I don't 'low to be thar. I hed got shet o' my hull load an' come up 'roun' on tother side o' Woodville, when th' darn fools set on me to see did I carry any licker. I tol' 'em ev'ybody know'd me, 'at I neveh hev nothin' to do weth them as teches licker, an' I tu'ned loose my wagon to 'em. They 'low'd I c'd set 'em on some secret trail to git into Dark Corner onbeknownst, an' I set 'em one."

He paused, and his dark eyes looked intently into those of Daniel McEwen, and his red lips drew back in a boyish, rollicking smile, showing even, white teeth. He stepped down from his seat and stroked the flank of his mule, as he stood facing the two men, and swung his broad shoulders with a swagger.

"Gawd a'mighty! I be'n settin' thar undeh thet hood, makin' out I were too peaceable to even stan' on my feet, ontwel I cain't ha'dly git the twist out 'n my laigs. An' I done worked them pore mules up this side the mountain ontwel they be like to perish."

He began to unhitch the traces, clanking the chains on the ground, and talked on. "I reckon we cain't count much on their keepin' to the road I sont 'em, fer they mount ask some damned party what hain't in ouah favor much. They is sich."

"Reckon ye betteh bide 'long o' we-uns?" asked Ross.

"Ef hit be all the same to you, hit's agreeable to me. Ef they come 'long here an' fin' my wagon and my mule critters stompin' and feedin' in yore yard, likely they'll see fer therselves 'at what I tol' 'em is true, 'at I'm livin' here an' haulin' fer ye."

"I reckon so. Jes' you lead 'em 'roun' thar. My fodder'll do ye as well as yourn. Leave yourn be here an' tie 'em in the shed 'hind the store."

Then Dave walked away, leading his weary, sweating mules around to the sheds back of the store, and Daniel McEwen and Comp Ross were left alone, facing each other. Daniel smiled, as he looked over the cabins scattered about, to see how suddenly the incoming wagon had brought a show of life to the Settlement. Sunbonneted women and bareheaded and barefooted children, slouching men, and scantily clad boys and girls appeared, trailing along the diverging paths in all directions.

"Wall, I reckon I'll be goin'. Ye got any licker handy?"

"Not right handy, no. You go on up the trail, — be ye goin' by Cloud's Mill? So. Then ye may find a jug somewher's thar, nigh a notched sweet-gum off somewhere's tow'ds yer right afteh ye cross the branch. Hit may hev licker in hit, an' hit may not."

Daniel felt in his pocket and drew out two silver coins, which he dropped in Compton Ross's palm without looking at them. He lifted his soft felt hat to one or two women who were passing. "Wall, I reckon I betteh be goin', an' pay ye now fer thet tobacco. Good day." He swung off with leisurely stride, and soon he and Bess were climbing back up the mule path towards Cloud's Mill, where

he had left his sack of corn for grinding an hour or more before.

Some one was climbing the path ahead of him, he knew by the set of Bess's ears, although he saw no one. Presently she started and shied as a rolling stone rustled through the brush above her and crossed her path. Whoever it was had left the trail and was cutting straight up through the laurel in careless haste.

"Whar be Dave goin', this plum fool way?" he asked himself and urged Bess to a rapid walk. "Git on, Bess. Ye hain't afeared o' sich a fool boy, git." Bess broke into a trot, and soon they were above the climber as the path wound and turned upon itself, and Dave appeared shouldering his way upward, apparently unheeding their presence.

His face was pale with fatigue and exertion, and his hair, matted and damp, fell heavily over his forehead. He carried his old black felt hat in his hand, and his homespun shirt clung to his lean, huge frame as wet as if he were emerging from a stream.

"Howdy," said Daniel McEwen.

"Howdy," said Dave.

"'Pears like you be in right smart of a hurry."

"I be," said Dave, offering no further explanation, yet he stood without making any move to go on.

"We-all knows each otheh here on these mountains, an' I 'low we stan's by one anotheh, but will you tell me hucome you thar 'long o' Lee Bab? You know's me, Dan'l M'Cune." A dark flush spread over the younger man's face.

"Oh, I'm frien'ly. I neveh do be givin' any of ouah mountain people away. You reckon the officers kin find the Cove? Ef they do, the's likely to be trouble."

"Yas, I reckon, an' likely the'll be mo' trouble fer who hev tol' 'em how to git thar. Hit'll be hell fer sich."

"Look here, lad, you be a coon dawg a-barkin' up the wrong tree. I'm willin' to he'p ye, but I thought I'd say to ye 'at ye'd betah keep whar ye won't hev to go on the chain gang. Be ye goin' up thar now?"

"I be. I be goin' to he'p the women an' chil'en git away. Ther'll be some shootin' an' killin', fer they be ready fixed fer doin' damage, an' thet means hell fer th' women. I'll give warnin' an' carry them down as can come, an' the men thar can stan' fer therselves."

"Be ye lowin' to take 'em to Cloud's place?"

"She be kin to ol' man Cloud, but he's thet pizen mad at her fer marryin' 'gainst him, they hev no doin's together. I 'lowed I'd likely git ol' woman Basle to keer fer the women, down to the Settlement. Ef only I kin git thar befo' the officers fin' out the trail, but they be hot fer hit, I tell ye. I hearn 'em talkin' how they were goin', an' I see they had the right scent, but I th'owed 'em off all I could."

"Bes' thing to cl'ar the Cove an' leave 'em satisfy therselves huntin'. Then leave 'em cool off fer a spell. I'll 'low ye to ride Bess up thar, an' likely ye kin fetch th' mule back's fer as the mill, whar I'll wait fer ye. You'll mebbe fin' things some dif'unt from what ye mount think. I cain't say 'at I'm right friendly with Lee Bab myse'f, but I hain't nothin' 'gainst women, nohow." He dismounted and made the young man take his place. "Thar, Bess. He'll be good to ye."

"I'll not fergit this," said Dave, and Daniel McEwen walked on, knowing he had won a friend.

But it was not for that he allowed his mule to leave him,

nor for any regard for the woman he had seen lying unconscious in drunken abandon in the cabin. He knew that were the officers to come and find the place empty, they would respect the dead. It was because he wished that poor wasted form to be laid respectably away in her grave, and he would not be seen there himself, nor would he have Dave Turpin know he had ever been to the Cove, or that he had ever known Sally Cloud. His secrets were his own, and there was now nothing he could do for her but to thus covertly help the young man on.

He supposed Lury and the babe were safe for the present, and decided to let the young man find out things for himself; but he would, in common humanity, lend him his mule, the more readily because he saw that Dave was near the end of his strength and feared he might not be able to reach the Cove until the officers would be there. As for "ol' man Cloud", he knew well the bitter enmity that existed between him and Lee Bab. Bab had married Cloud's niece against her uncle's wishes, when he had cared for her as a daughter. It was an ancient feud, a hundred years old, surely, and the natural death of a Cloud had long been to be shot by a Bab; and for a Bab to meet his death by a bullet sent by a Cloud was but customary and to be expected in the course of mountain events.

"I reckon they's nothin' mo' fer me to do," said Daniel softly. "Hit's like the Bible say: 'Let the dead bury ther dead,' fer she hain't thar, nohow. I'll neveh turn 'gainst mountain people fer the revenues, but ef eveh I c'n git Lee Bab to know why I'm doin' hit, I'll put a bullet in his heart and feel like Lury say. I'll laugh to do hit. I hain't neveh teched him fer her sake, but I will now."

He crossed the branch, and finding the notched sweet-gum tree, he knew where to find the jug. It was a farce played between him and Ross, yet one always gravely adhered to. He lifted the jug and set it in a thick clump of wild flag near the margin of the branch, where it would be more securely hid, and continued his way to the mill. The sound of water falling over the dam and the burring of the great wheel were pleasant to hear. The interior was sweet smelling and whitened with meal dust. Only the boy who helped around stood within, chewing corn and watching the slowly turning millstone. The miller and his wife were sitting in the door of their cabin on the hillside above the mill.

The couple were idly watching the honey bees fly out and in at the peaked gable end of the mill. A colony had pre-empted the gable a year before, and the Clouds were speculating as to how they were ever going to get their toll of honey from those vagrant lodgers on their premises. They were a comfortable looking couple, low-voiced and gentle of manner, not at all the sort one would imagine entertaining a feud, and the miller certainly was not one who would naturally be suspected of being "pizen mad" about anything.

"I don't keer ef they fill the hull roof full o' honey," the miller was remarking. "I reckon we betteh 'low 'em hev the place ontwel hit's clar plum full o' honey, an' then smoke the durn, leetle, hot-tailed fellers out. We'd hev enough honey to las' the rest o' ouah lives, an' hit be bes' kin' o' sweetnin' fer corn-bread or licker, heap betteh'n 'lasses, an' cost us nothin'. Howdy, M'Cune, howdy. Be ye afteh yore meal? I reckon hit's ground." He hunched himself along down the beaten path to his mill,

lifting shoulders and elbows at each step, talking as he went. "Go on up an' have a glass o' buttermilk with the ol' woman. Whar's yer mule?"

"I lef' Bess a piece back, — thank ye, I won't stop fer th' buttermilk, but I'll ask ye to give me a leetle salt, ef ye'll be that kind. I clar plumb forgot to get hit at th' store, an' hit's a right smart piece to go back fer hit. I'll jes' git my meal, an' tote hit long whar I lef' the mule, and git on up th' mountain."

He lifted his hat and waved his hand in salute to the miller's wife, seated in the doorway. A smile was on his lips, and his carriage was that of a prince. Even as he walked away from the mill with his sack of meal on his shoulder, he stepped off with it as if it were a feather weight, and his hat a crown.

"Wall, he be a quare one!" said the miller's "ol' woman", as her "ol' man" returned and sat by her side again. "Now what did he leave thet mule o' his'n down the road an' tote thet meal down that-a-way fer? He's plum foolish oveh thet mule, pettin' her like she were a human."

"He hev to be foolish oveh somethin', I reckon; he hain' no ol' woman to make oveh an' do fer."

"He'd oughter 'a' married Sally, an' thar he were thet foolish to 'low her take up with sich a low-down critter — the' hain't nothin' low-down 'nuff to call him as she married." The wife spat contemptuously, as if nothing else would express her feeling, and continued: "What did he ask fer salt fer? He be goin' on a drunk, thet's what. He won't go home this night. He'll make him some bread in a holler, an' fill hisse'f plum full o' whisky, an' lie thar. Ef he'd married Sally, she'd 'a' looked afteh him, an' thar she

be, nothin' on this earth but slave fer sich — a — low-down —"

"Wall, leave be talkin' 'bouts hit. Ef I hed 'a' done my duty, or M'Cune eitheh, Lee Bab'd 'a' be'n undeh the yarth now, whar he b'long. You neveh would 'low me put thet bullet whar hit'd oughter go, an' they hain't no death fer a Bab but jes' only with a Cloud bullet in his heart, an' thet be too good a death fer this Bab. Hit's yore fault he be livin'."

"An' my fault you be livin' an' settin' here 'long side me. I neveh were hankerin' fer my ol' man to be shot or workin' roads on a chain gang down in the low country."

"Women be turr'ble skeered critters."

"Turr'ble skeered fools fer them as they keer fer, but ef I'd 'a' hed the chanct, I'd 'a' put Bab undeh the groun' myse'f. Hit weren't yore place nor mine, neitheh, to do hit. Hit were the duty of M'Cune, an' he mus' 'a' hed a wife, as some say, some'ers, or he would 'a' done hit."

So the two took up the usual endless speculation over the past of Daniel McEwen, while that individual walked on to a place overlooking the mill road, his meal sack on his shoulder, and his jug of whisky in his hand. There, where he could watch for the return of Dave Turpin without being himself seen, he dropped his load and threw his hat beside it, and stood a while looking up at the sky arching over him, lighted with the glow of a red sunset.

Then he uncorked his jug and drank a few swallows of the raw liquor, and sat with his head in his hands, patiently waiting.

After a while, he unfolded his county paper, and opened the meal sack. Taking out a few handfuls of meal, he

carried it down to the banks of the stream in the paper. There he searched until he found two thin, flat stones of broad surface, and washed them carefully; then he proceeded to knead on each one of them a cake of meal, mixed with water from the brook and seasoned with the salt he had brought from the mill.

Carrying his neatly shaped cakes on the two stones, he returned to his point of outlook, where he scraped away the dead leaves from the red soil, gathered sticks, and built a fire, before which he set the stones propped on edge, and watched the cooking of his supper. As they slowly baked, he took from many wrappings of paper a few slices of white salt pork and laid them above the browning cakes, and soon the air around him was pervaded by the fragrance, appetizing and sweet, of roasting corn and toasting meat.

It was a good supper and a satisfying one, only too frequently he savored the contents of the jug. It was long before Dave returned with Bess, and when he did so, McEwen was still sober enough to call out to him:

"Tie her thar, an' I'll come an' fetch 'er. You take yore se'f back to the store, while the way's still cl'ar."

"Thank ye," said Dave huskily, and no more was said between them. Then Daniel, carrying himself a little unsteadily, went down and placed his sack across the mule, and tying his jug to his saddle, mounted and rode away under the twinkling stars, swaying and swinging a little too far over as the mule moved from side to side, yet always recovering his poise and clinging to the saddle.

CHAPTER IV

LURY ON GUARD

LURY stood in the doorway, looking after Daniel McEwen's retreating form until it was lost to sight; then she turned into the cabin and there stood still in the middle of the room, looking all about her. On the bed the babe slept, and without the sun shone brightly, and silence reigned, the soft, rustling, whispering silence of the wilderness. She drew a deep, long breath and stepped over to the bed, moving softly with her bare feet, and lifted the square of quilt Daniel had covered the little one with, and peered at him.

"Jes' me an' him," she said and crept away and began to sew the edges of the other pieces of quilt as she had been directed to do. For a long time she sat thus clumsily working, with long stitches crudely turning the edges to hold in the cotton. She had never been taught to use a needle, but by nature she was deft and observant, and soon she became deeply absorbed in her womanly task; before the day was half gone, she had done all Daniel had told her she might do and more, for when she went to get a little milk for the child, she also thought of the welfare of Josephine. So, after comforting the little babe and wrapping him in the clean squares of sheeting, and washing the old blue apron and hanging it to dry on a laurel shrub, she fed the cow and led her to water at the hollowed log by the well, where she had washed herself that morning.

Then she searched about and found the meal, and baked some corn bread as her mother had taught her, and fried meat, and ate, always watching the babe and thinking of him with busy brain. She had no time to think of herself, only now and again, when she remembered the still, wasted form lying on the mahogany bed in the cabin at the Cove, she would cover her face and sob. What troubled her most was the thought that there was no one left there to take care of it. She knew that Ellen Furman was lying in the cabin in a drunken stupor, and that her father was crazed with the terrible corn whisky he himself made; that Dave Turpin, always her friend and protector in that disordered home, was off selling his load in the low country, and that rumors of the revenue officers' approach had sent Lee Bab and Jim Furman into hiding in the deeper recesses of the hills, where they took their worm, the only thing of value belonging to their still, to conceal it until the danger had passed.

She reasoned that when Ellen awoke and found herself alone with the dead, she would take her baby boy and walk down to the Settlement for help, but when would that be? Meanwhile, with Dave away, she dared not return. She could not stay there alone with the dead and her terrible crazed father until the rest came back to look after her and the babe, and when that would be she could not know. So for the time she was most utterly forlorn and homeless. Her heart brooded with warm gratitude on the thought of Daniel McEwen and his gentle kindness, yet here she could not stay for long, either, for her father must never know she had been here at all. She had not forgotten his threat to shoot "Dan'l M'Cune" on sight, if ever they even mentioned his

name. No wonder she sobbed and trembled when she thought of the motherless home and the helpless babe her hungering, childish heart, with premature motherly instinct, had begun to cherish!

Seated in the cabin, close to the bed whereon the babe lay sleeping the deep, passive sleep of the newly born infant, and thinking with childish brain those unchildish thoughts which necessity had taught her, trying to contrive a way to nourish and guard and keep the little one, and how to clothe it, and how to live, now that her mother no longer could stand between her and the rest of her wild, irresponsible kinsfolk, — absorbed thus, she was startled by hearing voices at the well, men's voices and laughter.

She sprang to the window and looked out furtively, keeping in the shadow and peering through the crack of the hinges of the half open shutter. Two young men had halted there and were pulling water up by means of the long well-sweep. One of them held the bucket tipped toward him as it rested on the curb, and the other stood ready to dash its contents over his companion the moment he began to drink.

"I say, hold on a moment, will you? You've had a drink; stop your row, or you'll have some one out here to shoot you up."

The other cast a glance at the cabin. "It's empty. Go ahead and 'quaff the water free.' I'm holding up. Quaff, quaff, I say."

"Well, why not say 'drink'? It's good English; just as good as quaff."

"I can't, I'm living in the past — two hundred years in the past, earlier even than the *Cotter's Saturday Night.* I'm living in the days of the border strifes, with smugglers

hiding in the hills, and *Scots Wha Hae*, and *Erin go Bragh*, and all that sort of thing. No one knows what a night may bring forth, or when the border ruffian may slip up on you and stick a knife in your throat. Therefore, instead of saying drink, I say quaff. It's more in keeping with the times in which I find myself up here, and it's more like Robert Louis Stevenson and the poets."

His friend took a long draft and then lifted his head, still holding the bucket tipped.

"I say, Bob Kitchel, hold up!" he shouted. "The poets make me sick. I'm here for business." He grinned over the bucket's brim and then began again to "quaff."

The grin was too much for Bob Kitchel, and with a deft movement he lifted his foot and turned the bucket over his friend's head. There was a moment of gasping silence, broken by Bob's shout of laughter, as his friend straightened up, wearing the bucket as a helmet.

"Well, come and take it off," he said, speaking in smothered tones from its depths. "That was a very good shower, best I've had in these regions." Bob lifted the heavy, watersodden bucket from his friend's shoulders. "And now I'm quite cool, thank you, I'll just give you a lift," and stooping quickly, he caught Bob amidships and lifted him in the air; swinging the slight, slender fellow easily over his own broad shoulders, he stooped as if to drop him down the well.

Lury cringed back and clasped her hands as she saw the kicking, struggling young man being dangled helplessly over the depths, but when his bigger friend whirled about and laid him down in the brimming trough which she herself had so lately filled, she laughed outright. At the sound of

her laughter, both the dripping men laughed also, shaking the water from their streaming hair, and approached the cabin.

They were looking for the place of Daniel McEwen, but seeing this ragged, barelegged, little girl standing there in the doorway, they hesitated, having been told he lived alone.

"We've lost our way, it seems," said the big engineer, Barney O'Harrow. "Can you tell us where Daniel McEwen lives?"

Instantly Lury's fears and suspicions were aroused. All the tales of nefarious reasons for McEwen's isolated life here came into her mind, and with them the determination to shield him from capture; for what purpose did men of this class ever come to these hills other than to bring to justice some offender against their troublesome and always to be evaded laws? Fortunately, Daniel was away, and they might continue to think, for all the information she would give them, that they were far out of their way, indeed.

"I don't guess," she replied vaguely, gazing steadily into the eyes of the questioner, her soft brown eyes peering out from under her long, sweeping lashes with that peculiar faunlike expression, innocent and infantile, which had first touched Daniel's heart.

A swift glance of mystification passed between the two young men, which did not escape her steady, dreamlike gaze, but no shadow of understanding passed over her face. Then Bob Kitchel stepped forward, smiling, and sought to elicit some more definite information.

"You mean Daniel McEwen does *not* live here?"

"I reckon so."

"Well, do you live here?"

"Yas, I reckon."

"Don't you know where Daniel McEwen lives?"

"Not rightly."

"Well, we were told he lived here or near here, with a well like this with a long sweep in front of the cabin."

Lury did not reply to this but stood in passive silence.

Then Barney spoke. "Take the grin off your face, you goat, and let me try," he said. "Do you know where Daniel McEwen lives?" he asked peremptorily, as if to shake her out of her apparent lethargy.

"I don't reckon," she said; then, with a little gasp of fear, as she saw his stern look, she added explanatorily. "He be no kin to we-uns."

"No kin to we-uns," gave him an idea. "Who are your kin? You don't live here alone, surely." She remained silent. "Who lives here with you?"

"I lives with my brotheh."

"Where's he?"

"In yandah. He be sleepin'." She stood squarely in the doorway, and the men glanced in toward the bed in the corner and saw only a confused heap of a little bundle.

"Only a kid," said Bob. "Won't you tell me what your name is?" he asked, speaking more gently than his friend had done.

The sense of loyalty was strong in her. She was on the defensive, as they could see, but for what they little dreamed. If she gave them her name, they would guess she belonged to the crowd for which they were no doubt searching, and that she would know where Bab's still was. Yet why they

desired to learn the whereabouts of Daniel she could not imagine, unless to secretly turn him over to the law also. In her extremity, she thought of what Daniel had asked her when he found her there in Bear Wallow, "Be yore name Sally Cloud?" and she answered:

"Sally Cloud."

Now the young men looked at each other in surprise. They had stopped earlier in the day at Cloud's Mill and had eaten breakfast there. They had been through the Settlement and had bought up all the cob pipes, as Ross had said, and they had received very careful directions how to find the cabin belonging to McEwen.

"Be you kin to miller Cloud, down to the Settlement?" asked Bob Kitchel, trying the mountain vernacular.

"Yas, I reckon. Maw say so."

"They said it was a cabin with a rail fence around it and a well with a sweep in front, exactly like this, — " ruminated Bob.

"They be a heap o' wells like this'n weth a long stick to haul the bucket on ouah mountains." She spoke with more animation, and her face lighted with the thought that thus she might rid herself of her strange visitors. "The' were a man name' Dan. M'Cune. He lived a right smaht piece oveh that-a-way." She pointed vaguely in the opposite direction from the way they had come. "I reckon he mount be thar yit, ef hit be him ye lookin' fer."

"Well, I guess that's about all we can learn here," grumbled Barney. "We may as well get our grub and go on. Can you lend us a pail, Sissy, to carry a little water to make our coffee with?"

Lury never heard of a pail, but she well knew how water

was to be carried, so she stepped swiftly back in the cabin and brought a lard pail.

"I reckon ye c'n tote wateh in this 'ere grease bucket," she said.

"Thank you. This will do finely." Bob took it, and lifted it to his nose and sniffed suspiciously. It was only to learn if it was clean, but Lury resented the action for quite another reason.

"We neveh don't hev no licker to ouah house," she said. Why should he sniff, if he were not searching for stills and "licker?" No doubt they were really searching the mountains for the cunningly hid still beyond the house in the Cove where her dead mother was now lying. No one had ever discovered this particular still, for which Dark Corner was famed, and it was the boast of Bab and his crew that no one could find it. Poor, loyal, little Lury, resenting the action of the sniffing stranger, who only wanted a clean pail in which to carry water for his coffee, fearing lest he discover her worthless father's deadly secret! She was glad now she had not told him her name. If she had said Bab, they might watch her, and might trace her there sometime, for she thought of nothing else than that she must eventually go back and live in the only place she had ever known as home.

The two men strode off toward the well. "We'll fetch this back soon, thank you," called Barney.

"I c'n come fer hit, when yer through weth hit," she said, as they glanced back at her standing in the door, watching them.

She went over to the bed, where the babe, fed and warm, slept sweetly on. Glancing through the crack of the

shutter, she saw them fill the pail and walk off. A little later she saw smoke rising not far away, where they had built a fire for their coffee, and slipping out of the cabin, she made a circuit and drew near them through the thick laurel, until she stood close enough to hear their conversation. There, crouching low, silent as a rabbit, she waited.

"I wonder how much that child knows!" said Bob, raking dead leaves into the fire with a long stick from where he sat, while Barney the practical laid out the lunch. He was speaking of that which may be learned in schools, but poor Lury deemed the wonder to refer to her knowledge of stills and the deeds of the mountains in her own Dark Corner. "I can imagine Daphne with eyes like hers."

"Never saw the lady," said Barney. "Friend of yours?"

"Imagine Daphne looking out of a tree at you as you cook there. Her eyes would be wood brown, with golden lights in them, and her lashes — Gee Whitaker! Did you ever see such lashes! She would look aslant at you from under them, as if she were hiding something from you, and thus tantalize you into finding out her secrets. Now if I were a poet, I would make a song of Daphne and paint her to look like that child."

"Would you have her elbows out of her sleeves, and her bare legs scratched and sore, or would you have her clean and neat?"

"Poor little waif! How old do you suppose she is?"

"Nothing but a kid. She's probably 'kin' to some tough old moonshiner here. You bet she knows something about 'licker', as they call it. She thought you were sniffing for it in that pail, or why did she say what she did, and she looked startled too."

"I guess I'll sit over nearer that fire where I can dry off. If I had more than one layer of clothing on me, I'd remove a little, one layer, at least."

"Do it. The air's so soft you won't take cold."

"No, I'm accustomed to dine in full dress."

Bob changed his seat and came over where Lury saw only his back, but closer to her. Could they have seen her thus, crouching and listening with eager expression and parted lips, they would not have known her for the same child who, a moment before, was standing in the doorway passive and vague, giving slow, laconic replies to their questions.

"You know they say there is a still here in these hills, hidden away so cleverly that even the natives, half of them, don't know how to reach it," said Barney O'Harrow. "I think that's a dream, myself. I wager I could hit the trail — give me time. Ever see a still — a really primitive one such as they make moonshine in here?"

"No. I've a very good reason for that, though. I never was in these hills before. Say, you who are wise in the lore of the hills, what's 'Barwaller'?"

"Here's your coffee. Why, haven't you got busy yet? Open those sardines for me. You Gink — you've lived too long abroad to understand American. In this country you have to guess a little. Know what a 'b'ar' is?"

"'I reckon.' A bar is a thing a lawyer is admitted to, when he has learned how wisely to pervert the law; and a bar is where you stand to vulgarly take a drink and mistreat your fellows; also a bar is a long piece of timber so arranged in a fence as to prevent cattle from leaving a pasture unbidden, and it is likewise, in athletics, so arranged that long-legged students may leap over it and gain a prize,

thus attaining by their legs what they have failed to acquire by means of their brains; also a bar is —"

"In mountain vernacular a wild beast of the plantigrade species, thus called from the formation of their feet, which are so made that the foot is placed on the ground from the heel to the toe, instead of having the heel suspended where the elbow or the knee should be, as in the equine, bovine —"

"Hold up. I know a b'ar when I see one. I'm not ignorant. Where's this place, 'do you guess'?"

"You should say 'don't you guess.'" Barney spoke with his regard fixed on a sandwich of bread and cheese.

"Whar's B'ar Waller, don't you guess? That doesn't sound right, either. They have another way of bringing it in."

"What's your idea?"

"My idea is to find the place called 'B'ar Waller' — I've got it, hooray! A waller is a holler, whar b'ars go to waller, like hogs or chickens in a road. But do they, though?"

"Assume that they do and go on. Just dig out that idea from among the rubbish with which you've stocked your brain."

Bob stretched himself on the ground, face up, and pulled his hat over his eyes. Lury shifted her position a little for better concealment and settled back on her heels. He heard the stealthy movement and lifted his head, looking suspiciously around. "Wild creatures in these thickets. Hear them rustling? I do." He lay back again, listening and waiting. "Rabbit, maybe. Well, my idea is, find 'B'ar Waller' and then worry along through by degrees until you find the still. Remember that young guy we saw between Woodville and the Settlement, standing in the road

while the officers went through his wagon and fodder, hunting for moonshine?"

"Oh, you'll see those anywhere, covered wagons and a pair of mules or oxen. They always carry moonshine. That's what they go down the mountain for. That's their stock in trade. Make it up here and sell it down there, all they don't drink themselves."

"There's romance in these mountains. Did you hear what they called that young chap? Turpin — only it was Dave Turpin, instead of Dick, as in the old ballad. An outlaw and the descendant of outlaws. In the blood. I've been watching them all along. They're not all alike, by any means. The ones who belong to the wilderness — actually belong — are the fascinating ones. You recognize the difference as soon as you set eyes on them. You know they belong to the wild. That kid standing in the doorway does. You know it. You see it in their eyes and their lithe, strong bodies, but you don't find them hanging around the towns. You have to get clear up here at the very top to find them in their native haunts."

"Now just let me tell you, my boy, the less you have to do with that kind of still hunting the better. You'll have a bullet through your heart — they're your natural enemies."

"Well, I have something of the wild in me."

"You have. You are as wild as Mary's little lamb." Barney rose and began to stamp out the fire. "Take these culinary utensils to the well, will you? And wash them. Return also the 'grease bucket.' I'll pack the kit."

In the slight stir of moving about, they did not notice the rustling in the leaves near by and were surprised by the sight of the little maid standing close to them.

"I done come fer th' grease bucket," she said.

Bob stood looking down on her, holding a few tin dishes and a frying-pan in his hands, and Barney handed her the lard pail without a word, only that he felt in his pocket for a coin. She did not seem to know why he was handing the coin to her, and looked up at him as it lay in her palm with wide-eyed surprise. She had sold him nothing; at the Cove hospitality was always extended gratuitously, and pay was only taken for that which alone they had for sale, corn liquor, and then, except among themselves, always surreptitiously.

"What be this fer? I don't reckon I hev' nothin' to give ye for hit."

"Why, that's for the loan of your grease bucket."

She still demurred. "You done give the bucket back to me," she said and returned the coin.

"And that's fair, too," said Bob, with a smile. "You have given her back the pail, so she gives back the coin. Put it in your pocket and get understanding by experience. Come on, Sally Cloud, we'll wash these things."

A thin wail drifted toward them from somewhere; the child heard it and started back to the cabin on a run.

"There is something odd about all this," said Barney to himself. "I can't think she lives here alone with that infant rolled up there on the bed." He shook his head as he packed their small shoulder sack with the remainder of their canned food, lifted it to his back, and sauntered up the slope to the well.

The wailing had ceased when he reached his friend, who was scrubbing the frying-pan out with sand. Lury returned and looked on at the process with interest.

"That the way you wash dishes?" asked Bob.

She shook her head gravely, then surprised them with the inquiry: "Wha' be you-uns here fer?"

"We're here to find a way to make a road over this mountain, up this side and down on the other side, clear to the ocean."

She gazed where he pointed and then up to the top of Old Abe.

"Wha' you want to make a road thar fer?"

"Oh, there are a lot of people who want a road there. They want to get over the mountain without going around it."

"Wha' fer?"

"Oh, they like to be running around and seeing things and doing things. Can't you tell me the names of some of the people living up here? We may want to see some of them. Which way from here is B'ar Waller?"

Her eyes opened wide, and her lips quivered. She pointed vaguely in the direction which she had indicated before as the possible way to Daniel McEwen's.

"I reckon hit's yon' way," she said.

CHAPTER V

JUDGMENT

"WHO's Daniel McEwen, anyway. Where did you ever hear of him?" asked Bob Kitchel, as the two young men took their uncertain direction from the vague indication given them by Lury as "Yon' way."

"I heard of him from a banker in Woodville. He said this McEwen comes down to the bank once in so often with a few little pellets of gold, deposits them as so much currency and takes a receipt for them, and only uses a small portion to live on. He comes regularly about twice a year and never is seen in Woodville except on those occasions; never makes a friend of any one, is pleasant to all, but holds himself aloof, appearing from no one knows whence and disappearing no one knows whither."

"Who's the banker?"

"Richard Hadley. He's a very interesting man — lived there for the last half of his life and knows more about these mountains than any low-country man around. Hadley is the only man down there who knows McEwen, really, or could find his place; but he told me miller Cloud might direct me, if he could be convinced that the errand we were on was only a matter of road-making. They're so jealous of their rights here that they don't care to have the country opened up by roads. It only means innovation and the invasion of aliens."

"Well, why shouldn't they feel that way? Why should a lot of strangers be allowed to swoop down on them and change their customs, and impose their laws on them, and teach them dissatisfaction and unrest? They're content; why not let them stay so?"

"You can't get a thing out of me by your philosophizing. I'm no philosopher. Philosophers are hinderers of progress. I'm a road-maker, and from the beginning of the world pathfinders and road-makers have been the forerunners of progress and civilization. People talk a lot of bosh about the spirit of unrest and the discontent of the times. I say, why shouldn't people be discontented? Discontent has been good for the world. Philosophers always make me think of toads sitting back on their haunches and blinking and catching flies with their tongues."

"What are we in the world for, if not to be happy? If these people are happy, what more do they need?"

"Live among them a while and find out for yourself, as I have. How did you like the looks of the kid there in that cabin?"

"I thought her the most beautiful specimen of youth, poetic youth, without any influence of modern sophistication I ever saw or hope to see."

"Like her dirty, ragged dress and bare, scratched legs? Like her hair, tangled and unkempt?"

"She needn't have had a rag on, for all of me; she would have been a wonder of beauty. Why, didn't you see that she had sensitive lips, and wonderful eyes, and delicate color, and shapely hands and feet? Didn't you see that she held her shoulders like a — a — free, untrammeled

creature? One of God's own wild ones, that's what she is."

"She no doubt is that last, and I think she has exercised her natural right to say anything that will suit her purpose and has set us, for some reason of her own, off the track. I believe we were at the home of Daniel McEwen, and she lied to us."

"Then I would advise that we go no farther this way, but go back and learn the truth."

"For a philosopher, that's a sensible suggestion. How find out the truth?"

"Oh, hang around there somewhere and wait for your friend Daniel's return."

"Not there. If we wait where she can see us, she will find a way to set some of her tribe to watch us. I scent a mystery. She has some reason for being there and for setting us wrong, and she distrusts us."

"Well, let's hang around here then. Lie here and argue out a point in philosophy, sitting like toads in the sun, blinking and catching flies — symbolic for ideas — with our tongues. Then, after dark, let's find our way back to that cabin and see what we shall see. If he lives there, he will no doubt have returned, and we will have a way of learning the truth and whatever it is you want of him."

So the young men paused and stretched themselves out on the mountainside and looked up at the floating puffs of cloud and at the eagles soaring round and round above the craggy top of Old Abe; and they smoked in silence or varied the monotony of waiting with wordy arguments.

Meanwhile Lury stirred herself to immediate action. She had not understood much of what the young men had

said, but she was sure they were hunting her father's still and that they had met Dave on his way back; also she was sure they had some sinister reason for finding Daniel McEwen and for making a road over the mountain. The news Jim Furman had brought to the Cove that the sheriff was coming up the mountain with a posse must have been true; and yet it might not have amounted to anything, for often such rumors were rife, and then the danger would be averted by some of their scouts, who, ever on the lookout, were sometimes able, with a well-directed bullet or a word of warning, to send the officers back to safer quarters.

She well knew that the brothers Joe and Jim Furman and Lee Bab could take care of themselves, for they were on their own ground and knew their own hiding-places, but there was Dave Turpin coming back and likely to be on his way up to the Cove even now. No one would warn him there or at the still, where he would go first of all. She would go to the Settlement herself and wait there for him. She would go to "ol' woman Basle's" and take the baby and ask her to look after him while she went to find Dave.

So she searched the cabin for something in which she could carry milk for the babe and found an empty whisky bottle. This she filled with milk warm from the cow, and wrapping the infant in the covering Daniel had given her, she made a bundle of the rest, and tied it all together with the bottle in one of the pieces of sheeting. Then she started down the mountain with the babe in her arms.

Her fear of her father and her horror of the place where she had left her mother lying dead caused her to take a

way leading around by the mill, thus avoiding the Cove entirely, for although she was certain her father was hiding in the gorge, he might go to the cabin stealthily for food, unless the raiders were still there. Whatever came, she must warn Dave, and this seemed to be the only way.

Although she had never before been to the cabin of Daniel McEwen, she was able to trace her way back as far as Bear Wallow easily, but from there on she had to depend on her native instinct for the paths of the wilderness. Now she pattered along the smoothest of the trails in her bare feet, putting on her shoes only where she must to keep from cutting her flesh with the ragged stones at the steep places, where they had been washed bare of earth. This time she did not try to avoid the more traveled paths, for they were the ones where she was least likely to meet her father or either of the other men. The weight of the babe and the bundle, and the heavy shoes dangling from her elbow, though not great, became wearisome to the tired child, who had not slept throughout the whole of the night before. So wearisome did it become that she paused often to rest, as needs she must.

The stream that turned Cloud's Mill wound on its downward course for a long distance above the mill, crossing and recrossing the trail she took, and here, at one of these crossings, just before the sun went down behind the mountain, she sat where the last rays lingered and fed the little one, crooning to it and comforting herself by clasping its soft little body to her heart, and feeling the little round head in her neck. Then, when it again slept, she wrapped it warmly in a fresh piece of the sheeting and laid it rolled in the quilt, higher up on the bank, while she washed and

wrung the piece she had removed, and spread it over a sweet shrub to dry, instinctively acting the part of a veritable mother.

She ate a bit of the corn-bread she had baked and some fried pork, and then, drowsy in the soft, warm air, crept up and curled herself around the babe, and with her head on the bundle, she slept. Long she slept, and gradually the sun sank, and the shadows stole over her, and the bird songs ceased, all except the whippoorwills, who insistently called their demand through the hollows and over the hills.

Here, an hour after leaving Daniel McEwen near the mill, Dave Turpin, urging Bess up the short cuts and over the stream, heard a faint little sound unlike the usual sounds of the wild to which he was accustomed; and looking above him in the direction from which it came, he spied something white gleaming through the dusk. It was the piece of sheeting Lury had spread to dry. Pausing there and wondering, he heard another sound, a child's voice, cooing and crooning and sobbing all in one. He dismounted, in spite of his haste, and scrambling up the steep bank, he found them, the child and the babe. So absorbed was Lury in trying to comfort the babe that she did not hear his approach, for now the little one cried lustily.

"Thar, thar, honey-son. Thar, sisteh won' 'low nothin' hurt you," she sobbed, albeit frightened at waking and finding herself alone in the fast thickening darkness.

"Lury," said Dave, in astonishment. "Be thet you-uns?"

She sank down close to the earth, silent as a rabbit seeking cover, but the babe wailed on, to her dismay.

"Don't ye be skeered, Lury; hit's on'y me." Dave knelt down at her side. "Hu-come you here with that kid?"

"Oh, Dave, Dave! Gawd a'mighty! I'm glad hit be you!" she cried, catching him by the sleeve and twisting her hand in it to hold him the more securely, in her terror. "Dave, I be'n runnin' down the mountain; I be'n — Dave, they is men comin' for sure this time to break up the still, and Dave, maw's dade, and she give the baby to me, an' Dave, I'm skeered he'll die, an' I be'n runnin' all las' night, an' I'll tell ye hu-come I come here, but Dave, I be that tired I cain't walk no more."

"Pore little un. Now how about this?"

Mechanically again she began to rock and comfort the little one. "Thar, thar, sisteh won' 'low nobody tech you," she crooned, but the babe still wailed. "He be hongry, and his milk be cold. Don't leave me, Dave." She frantically clutched again at his sleeve. "I dasn't go home, 'thout paw'll kill me an' baby, too. He be'n drunk eveh sence you lef', an' hit's hell to ouah place, an' maw lyin' thar dade — an' — an' no box to put 'er in."

Dave still stood aghast; then he lifted Lury to her feet, and she stood in the darkness nestled close to him, clasping the babe. "I bin that skeered you'd come home an' not know the revenues was thar, an' they'd git you an' sen' you to the chain gang, that I b'en runnin' down the mountain to git you the word to keep away f'om thar, Dave; thet's hu-come I run here. I did'n know which-a-way you mount come up the mountain, ef by the Settlement or not; but I jes' run this-a-way an' chanced hit so. Hit were las' evenin' she drapped dade whar she stood by the fieh, stirrin' co'n-bread, an' paw hollerin' like hell."

Dave meditated heavily, and the wailing of the babe flustered him. "Well, how about this! Yore maw dade! How about it?" was all he could say, and he repeated it over and over until his thoughts grew coherent and practical. Then he said: "You bes' come weth me, Lury; I cain' leave you be here, an' I hev' hearn 'bouts the sheriff an' a lot o' men comin' up this-a-way. I were jes' goin' up to git you an' yore maw away f'om thar, anyway, 'fore the men could git up; but now she's dade an' you're here, I 'low I'll jes' let the res' on 'em take keer o' therselves. Come on. Ol' woman Basle'll look after ye fer one while I reckon, ef I pay 'er."

It was after Dave had taken Lury to the Settlement and put her in charge of the only woman whom he knew who could care for her and the child that he returned the mule to Daniel. Then he went back to the store and lay all night among the fodder under the shed where he had taken the mules. He was weary and heart-sick and lonely and hungry. He said to himself that now Lury was away and her "maw dade", the officer might come and "bust up the still and kill the hull gang" for all of him. He'd "done his best fer 'em, an' now he'd quit."

The kindness and care of the woman who lay there dead were all that had held him to the Cove. Long since he would have left and gone to make his way in Woodville, for his trips down the mountain to sell liquor for Bab had given him a taste for the town. He had conceived an ambition to work in a livery stable where he often sold a large part of his "load", and earn enough money to buy a farm; and then it was his plan to get Lury and her mother to leave the mountain and live with him.

His ideas on the subject were very vague, but at least he had been where there were schools and churches, and where people wore better clothing and lived in houses with gardens and flowers around them, and he had made his comparisons. He knew Bab despised these things and gloried only in his life of danger and secrecy, in the triumph of successfully evading the law, and in the thought that he would some day avenge himself on the officer who had once caught him and sent him up for two years on the chain gang. Always, when filled with his own whisky, he would lustily swear that the day would come when he would "cut that man's heart out."

Now, while Dave at last slept and Lury lay on a shake-down on the floor in the cabin of "ol' woman Basle", Daniel McEwen rode on up the trail and brooded. Never for a moment was the thought of the dead Sally Cloud out of his mind. All the years since he had known her came confusedly into his excited brain. Again he was parting from her as once he parted, when she left "totheh side the mountain" to come, an orphan, and live with her uncle, the miller Cloud. They had quarreled over some little thing, and she had said she would never see him again, and so the next time he passed her, she had turned her head away, but he had pursued her and kissed her. Ah, well he remembered it. Then, before he ever saw her again, she had gone. He had meant to follow her, but gossiping tongues kept them apart.

Now as he rode, it seemed as if he had but just ended running after her that summer evening and kissing her. He would go to her again. He would learn if there was any truth in the story that she had "gone to the singing

with Lee Bab, onbeknownst to her uncle." He would find out about that. The years that had passed between that moment and the present were as if they had never been.

"She be spoke fer, an' she be mine," he said again and again, as he clung to the saddle and swayed about on his patient, climbing mule.

That was a fateful night. Why Bess should have carried her master unguided along the trail he had taken that morning, when she would have preferred going home and standing quietly in her own log stall before her own box of corn, who may know. Certain it is she once more made her way to the Cove. It was still deserted. The officers had been there and gone. Awed, they had stood beside the dead woman and had stealthily crept away, and for the time had abandoned the place without carrying out their purpose of finding the still or taking possession of the cabin until they could locate the hiding-place of Bab's store of liquor.

Instead, they searched for the still all through the gorge, as often they had searched before. They had searched and had gone back to the low country again, baffled. As in the morning, Bess paused under the blackheart cherry-tree, and again Daniel McEwen tied her there. He had taken no more liquor since he left Dave, and he thought himself quite sober.

The moon shone by this time; it was late in rising, and he stood steadying himself in the door of the cabin. Only the dead lay there now, for Ellen had fled in horror when she roused herself at the approach of the officers, and had taken her baby and gone down to the Settlement, as Lury

knew she would. They had allowed her to go without question.

The moonlight streamed through the still open shutter, and fell slantwise across the bed. The dead face and the counterpane gleamed luminously white in its rays, and all the squalor and disorder and dirt of the wretched room was mercifully hid in the darkness. Still the rhododendron flower, drooping a little, lay on her breast, white as her white face and as delicately pure. Now indeed as he gazed, Daniel McEwen was sober. He felt no awe nor fear of the dead. Once he had kissed her. Once she had laughed in his eyes. Once he had loved her. — He loved her still. — Once he had hoped in spite of all to take her to himself, for she was his, — yes, his, — and now — He dropped on his knees at the side of the bed, with his arms stretched out across the wasted form and his head bowed.

Kneeling there, he heard a sound — half a whine, half a growl — was it the dog whining under the cabin? He lifted his head and listened, then rose to his feet, his heart pounding in his breast. He turned and saw a dark figure slinking back in the shadows of the weeds growing tall about the door, and he stepped down and went toward it.

"Git up f'om thar, Lee Bab," he said, and the thunder of his anger muttered low in his voice.

"What you doin' here," said Lee thickly, rising and leaning against the side of the house.

"Be ye too drunk to stan' up?"

"What you doin' here?" asked Lee again, standing straight and taking a step toward him. "You hev come at las', hev ye? Well, come on."

No, for once Lee Bab was not drunk. He had been in hiding all day and now, remembering how in the morning his wife had fallen while preparing his food, he was creeping back, fearing to meet the sheriff, yet seeking to learn if what Jim Furman had told him was true, — that she was dead.

"I hev come at las', Lee Bab. Hev ye anythin' to say fer yerse'f? Ye took f'om me one as belonged to me; hev ye done fa'r by her?"

The two men stood facing each other. A white heat of rage burned in Daniel's bosom, and Lee Bab quailed before him, but assumed an air of bravado while his hand sought his hip pocket.

"Shall we cut hit out, or shoot hit out?" he said, but the other was too quick for him and held him with the muzzle of his gun at Lee's breast.

"Drop yore han', Lee Bab, an' tell me: hev ye done fa'r by her?"

"Drap yore gun, Dan'l M'Cune, an' leave me go to 'er," the other whined. "You no call to come here."

"Naw, you'll neveh set eyes on her dead body. Hit's too white an' clean fer yore damned eyes to look on. They is no name undeh heaven mean enough to call ye by, 'er I'd call ye by hit fer the way ye hev done 'er. Ye hev done 'er to death at las', an' ye hev done hit slow an' sure, like I knowed ye would. She come back to you to save yore soul f'om hell fieh, an' you hev took the heart out'n her an' th'owed hit to the houn' dogs to keer fer. She be settin' up yandah now, longside o' the angels o' Gawd, an' I'm goin' to sen' ye whar yore damned, low-down soul'll burn in the hottest fieh o' hell to the end o' all time,

an' the devil'll set oveh ye and know what-all name to call ye by, fer I don't."

He fired, and Lee Bab dropped where he stood, with never a groan. Daniel McEwen stood for a moment, then tossed his gun at the dead man's feet and lifted his arms toward heaven. Then he threw back his head and covered his eyes with his hands. "I hev done this fer her. Hit were all I could do fer her. Gawd! Gawd! Gawd!" he cried. "I wisht I hed 'a' done hit long ago."

CHAPTER VI

DANIEL McEWEN'S HOSPITALITY

THE two young pathfinders awoke early the next morning, after the most delicious sleep possible to human kind — in the dry, soft air of the open, under the star-set sky, on a hillside overlooking the plain below.

Bob Kitchel aroused first and sat long with his arms clasped about his knees and his ears open to the songs of birds and insects, his eyes taking in the wonderful coloring of the dawn on cloud and valley and mountain peak. No dream could be more beautiful than the scene unrolled before him. It was as if he were on an island surrounded by a strange and nebulous sea of floating cobwebs, heaped and swung in mid space, waving and swaying out of aerial distances on circling air currents; touched on their heights with the purest gold, dissolving into rose and amethyst, and fading at last into the pale greens and blues of the mysterious island on which he sat.

Like a veil of diaphanous tissue spread between him and the valley below, they drifted past and gathered together in shifting masses, swept slowly up the heights, and entered into the vast blue overhead, revealing the plains beneath like a delicate carpet reaching from the mountain's base even to the farthest verge of eternity and disappearing in the void beyond the world. Never before had he seen thus the solemn and glowing beauty God spreads before his people, if they will but go out on his heights to see it.

"Hallo, Bob!" cried Barney, rousing himself and rising. "What do you think of that now? If I threw a stone from here, do you think I could hit the court-house down in Woodville? Glory! What a view!"

Bob rose slowly and began to roll up his blanket. He was like one brought suddenly out of a trance. The mists were clearing away, and the world had assumed once more the garb of yesterday and the day to be. "Now for breakfast," continued Barney. "How about it? Shall we try once more for the cabin?"

"Nothing else to do, since we have eaten all we had last night."

They had returned to Daniel McEwen's place the evening before, and finding it empty, yet having no surer way of meeting the owner than to await his coming, they had decided to sleep in the open rather than to retrace their steps to the Settlement.

"Why, yes, we might hunt for another cabin somewhere, or go back to the Settlement and set out again on a hunt for the place as we did yesterday, and get our breakfast there, you know."

"Well, just as you say."

"Do both. Go to the cabin, and if we don't find him, retrace our steps as far as the Settlement and from there follow on up and see where we missed it before."

"What's the white thing lying on the ground up yonder?" Bob pointed to a spot some distance above them. "We'd better go up there and see; we're off the trail, anyway."

So they clambered up through the laurel shrubs and found that indeed they were off the trail, for here was an

old road, no doubt the one for which they were searching, and the white object was a sack of corn-meal.

"This must be the old King's Highway Hadley was telling me about, that used to be the route along the mountain wall and through the gap a hundred years ago. The old mail-coach route. Some poor man has lost his 'rations.' What shall we do with it?"

"Why, tote it. There must be a home near, by this sign. Maybe it belongs to the man we are hunting for." Bob lifted it to his shoulder, but first he tied it more tightly, seeing it had been opened. "Now we have this as a pass to his favor."

When they arrived at the cabin, they saw the mule feeding along in the corners of the crooked rail fence that surrounded the doorway, still saddled and bridled, although this last was disarranged, and in the animal's eagerness to browse, she had stepped upon and broken her bridle rein.

"There has been an accident," said Bob.

"Something else the trouble, I judge," said Barney. "There he lies across his own doorstep. Is he dead?"

"Good Lord! I hope not."

"Don't worry. He's dead drunk, that's all," said Barney, stooping over him. "Well, now what? This is the man we want; I know by the description given me by Hadley. Look at him. Most men are disgusting when they are drunk, but he —"

"He certainly is different — a man of parts even when drunk. Let's get him out of it, if we can. What's the first thing to do?"

Barney O'Harrow entered the cabin and looked about him. "Bring in that sack of meal, will you? Let's take

possession. He may resent it when he comes to himself, but it's the best we know."

"He has quite a little outfit here," said Bob, stepping across the prostrate form in the doorway. "Let's make a fire and brew a little coffee, if he has any. That's the best thing to give him when he wakes. Let's treat ourselves to his hospitality. He'll take it all right, or I miss my guess."

"See if he has a gun on him," said Barney. "If he has, take it. Then if he wakes in a belligerent frame of mind, he will have nothing to do any damage with."

Barney was searching about for means to prepare a breakfast. "I hate to touch a man's pockets when he's drunk," said Bob. "This is a fiendish situation. We'd better pull off his shoes and get him up on his bed. This is indecent. Poor cuss."

"Get his gun, if he has one, and his knife, too. Then you may do as you like. I'm getting breakfast."

"But let's get him up on his bed. He's in the way here. We have to step over him all the time."

"No, let him alone." Barney came and looked down on McEwen. "You see his hip pocket's empty; he has no pistol." A box of cartridges lay beside him where they had slid from his pocket.

"These are deadly ones, and if he had a gun for them, it is well he is rid of it. And here's a knife, as wicked looking as any I ever saw; we'll take these and return them when he's sober. Now if he wakes ugly, we'll be able to handle him. Just let him lie as he is. He might resent it, if he awoke and found we had meddled with him. They're queer folks."

Then the two went on with their work in the cabin as if the premises were their own. They even went out to the lowing cow and fed her, and Barney milked her; for Bob was ignorant of the process of "extracting the milk from a cow", as he said. They brewed coffee and made corn-cakes with passable skill, and set out the shelf table with the little store of dishes, like good housewives.

"Wouldn't we make well-trained husbands, though? Now we are fit to marry suffragettes," said Bob. "Suppose for instance our wives should return from a political rally in the condition of this individual spread over his threshold, we would then have the privilege, seldom accorded to men, of rising superior to the situation. We can bake, we can brew, we can fry, we can stew, we can —"

"Oh, stop your nonsense and watch the coffee for me a minute. Watch it, I say; don't let it boil over."

Bob stooped and was reaching for the handle of the coffee-pot with a stick, to draw it away from the heat, and Barney was engrossed in laying slices of salt pork in the hot frying-pan, when their attention was attracted to the doorway by a gentle:

"Howdy, gen'l'men."

They both straightened up suddenly and turned away from the fireplace, wiping the perspiration from their faces, in some confusion. Also they both grinned, as who should say: "We are caught in the act."

Daniel McEwen, raised on one elbow, lay quiescent in the doorway, watching them with his derisive smile playing about his lips and a twinkle in his eyes. "Don't 'low me to disturb ye. Go right on with yore work; hit's interestin'."

"It is," said Barney, "but it's difficult. I can do it better in the open, where I'm accustomed to do it."

"You are a-doin' fus' rate, but ye stan' too clost in to the fieh. Haul the skillet out a leetle and drap in yore po'k, an' then sorter slide hit back thar. So."

"We must ask your pardon —"

"Naw, ye don't. Ye axes my parding fer nothin'. This 'er hull place be yourn." He waved his arm grandly, including the cabin and the yard and the universe generally in its sweep. "I hev be'n lookin' fer ye to come 'long abouts now." He sat up and leaned his back against the door jamb and clasped his hands about one knee. His head was light, and he would not trust himself to stand on his feet, but his manner was that of a prince conferring favors. "You shore hain't come up f'om the Settlement this mo'nin'?"

"No. We got up yesterday, about noon, but there was a little girl here who told us you did not live here." Bob drew the coffee from the fire as he explained. He missed the flash that passed as quickly as it came in Daniel's eyes. "She said you lived over 'yon' way', and so 'yon' way' we went, to find only the wilderness, and as we knew nothing better to do, we returned here this morning."

"Now, thar's whar ye done jes' right. They is no countin' fer chillen 'er what they will say. I reckon hit's natchel to 'em." He rose now and sauntered into the cabin and stood before the neatly laid shelf. "You hev right smaht settin'-out here, an' now here's what. I'll ccept o' yore hospitality ef you'll accept o' mine. Shall 're set? I hev mo' cheers some'ers on the place; jes' ou wait a minit."

"Let me fetch in the bench there by the door," said Barney. "That will do for us."

So they brought in the bench, and all three sat down amicably to break bread together, the courtesy of the table being extended by Daniel. It was gracefully done, and at the same time the two young men felt themselves held aloof, set by themselves as it were, in a manner both baffling and disconcerting. At last Barney O'Harrow decided to face the situation by coming straight to the mark and stating their business. Bob Kitchel, utterly ignorant of the mountains and the mountain people, wisely kept silence.

"You said you were expecting us, so I judge Mr. Hadley must have told you of our reasons for coming to you. I believe you are one of the commissioners for this part of the county, are you not? They are determined to have a good automobile road built over the ridge, and I am sent on to lay out the general course of it. I have my maps, but the knowledge of a man who knows every foot of the ground is much more valuable to me than all the maps ever made. Hadley says you're the man, and sent me to you."

"Wall, I reckon I do know putty much all they is to know 'bouts these here mountains, but they is a heap to talk oveh 'fore we-uns 'low any doin's hereabouts. I hearn yestidy the rev'nue officers be'n searchin' these parts again. They be them 'at reckons we hev all the roads we keer fer. An' then again, they be them 'at wants hit." He paused, and the two young men sat silent and waited. As that course seemed to get them no further on, Barney tried again.

"What would you advise?"

"I don't reckon I hev advice to give ye, much, on'y this: they is ways of gittin' what ye want 'at's healthy, an' then again they is ways 'at's onhealthy."

"I see. Well, then all the more we need your help, that's plain; and Hadley said he thought we might count on you."

"I reckon ye mount. Well, which-a-way you reckon do they want the road to run, oveh top o' the ridge or kinder th'ough the hollers? Ef hit be the ridge ye like to foller, thar's the ol' King's Highway 'at be 'bouts the best, I reckon, on'y some washed and chucked full o' bresh whar the timber be'n growin' in right smaht."

"Isn't that road in use now?"

"They is places whar hit's still used, but ouah people hev no use fer a wheel road much. They 'low to fetch an' carry on hoss back an' go putty much whar they likes that-a-way."

"Well, now, Mr. McEwen, we're sent here to lay out the general route, and if you can help me to find the healthiest way, I venture to promise we won't trouble your people at all. The revenue officers are nothing to me, and I don't care what you people do, for it's not my business. Will you set me on the King's Highway? I'm sure that's the route for us. I imagine we were on it when we came up here this morning. We found your sack of meal there a little way back and brought it on with us."

Then Daniel grew affable and kindly and said he would look after his stock a little and then go out with them. It was his intention to do this from the first, but he wished to have them ask his services, not to offer them. It was

his intention, moreover, to keep the route confined to safe places, where the traveling public, when they were admitted to the mountain, should be able to skim by, as ignorant of the real mountain secrets as if the road had never been opened.

He had been appointed road commissioner for this locality for that very reason, and he now proposed to be the sole director of the route. It would be an easy matter to conduct them over the mountain by ways that led to none of the native haunts, even by ways that would leave these haunts as isolated as if the road had never been built. Whereas, if left to themselves, the young men would be more than likely to stumble on places from which they might never be allowed to return.

"He's a canny old coon," said Bob, when Daniel was well out of hearing. "He's a foxy one."

"I think we'd better follow his advice to the letter, though. I know enough of these people to understand that there will be a fight on before ever this road is put through, if we don't. You see, it isn't as if we were projecting a railroad. That goes on its way, just flying through, but no one gets off and hangs around. They go through and done with it. But now that automobiles are going to enter their fastnesses, their privacy is gone, — and a good thing, too."

"As soon as your work of deciding on the general route is done, I suppose you will have a gang of men on, and the natives will have something to worry over."

"No, the surveyors will go first, and then the gang will follow. It will be let to contractors, and some of them will be their own people, so that will take care of itself."

"And the price of corn whisky will mount?"

"It will if they are sharp, and they are. The price of their land will go up, too. They're no fools when it comes to getting the best of a bargain. I've tried them on that."

They worked as they talked, and when Daniel returned, he found everything as neat as they had found it. They had packed their own kits as well and prepared to shoulder them as they set out.

"Ye mount leave them be. Ye'll want 'em when ye git back," said Daniel. It was his way of inviting them to stay on with him while in his vicinity. They quietly unstrapped their kit and blankets and left them in the cabin, with the door swinging wide open.

"We neveh locks ouah doahs," said McEwen with pride.

CHAPTER VII

THE DOG STANDS GUARD ALONE

While Daniel McEwen was conducting Barney O'Harrow and Bob Kitchel over the old coach road, across the ridge, and along the slope of the mountains on the farther side, toward the gap which would at last lead them to the long, level reaches of the low country extending to the sea, David Turpin disconsolately climbed back to the Cove, and there looked on the face of the dead woman who had taken him in when he came to her, a lost, starving lad, knowing but his name and that his mother was gone, somewhere, and had left him alone in the wilderness.

Just so she had lain the whole of the day before and throughout the long night past, and still the dog kept watch at the door, whining beside the dead body of his reckless reprobate of a master, sometimes creeping with trembling limbs to the side of the great mahogany bed and rising to rest his paws on its edge, then slinking back to the dead man outside. Now he came in and stood close to Dave, pressing his head against the young man's knee and gazing up at him with tender, sorrowful, brown eyes.

The tears rolled down Dave's cheeks, grown ashy pale as he stood there, his hand on the dog's head and his eyes fixed on the waxen, sunken face of the woman and the dead flower on her breast. The utter loneliness and silence of the place filled him with a vague terror, and his face

was distorted with grief, his lips trembling, and his heart throbbing painfully in his throat.

A wren piped a wild and cheery note outside the window, startling him out of his trance-like sorrow. He turned his head and then looked down on the dog.

"Pore critter, I reckon you'd be cryin' too ef ye knowed how. Whar's the folks gone? Fool folks they be to run off an' leave the dade weth on'y a dawg to watch by her. Whar's Lee Bab? Reckon ye c'n find him fer me?"

At the mention of that name, the dog walked stiffly out the door, with drooping tail and head. The hog stood not far off, sniffing and nosing around, and the dog dashed at him furiously, as he had done again and again during the past night in defense of his master's body. Then Dave saw the body of the man, lying hidden in the long weeds.

"Pore houn' dawg, you be better'n humans, bidin' here an' takin' keer o' th' dade. An' Lee Bab done to death by them rev'nues, an' ev'ybody skulkin' an' hidin'— Gawd! This here be Hell!" He paused but a moment, stirred out of his lethargy by the double tragedy. The feeling that by the death of Lee Bab he had something to do was a relief to the horrified man. The thought put energy and heart in him.

"You sure be a good dawg," he said, patting the animal's head, as he returned to him. "You bide here an' keer fer 'em, like you be, an' I'll come back d'reckly."

He ran down the slope toward the stream, and leaping it, hurried on up the gorge. The Furman brothers must still be in hiding, yet from what Lury had told him, he was sure they knew the woman lay there dead with no one

to care for her, and he was angry. He was aware of their hiding-places and knew he could find them.

"They be coward skunks," he muttered. "They keer fer ther own hides an' be willin' fer chillen an' babies to be driv off, an' women done that mean 'at they'd ruther die 'n live."

He had no fear now of the sheriff or officers. He supposed they had done their work and gone, and even if they had not, he would have faced them alone. Horror and sorrow drove him on. The gorge narrowed suddenly, and a great rock jutted out in front of him, so that his progress seemed to be completely blocked. Here the path seemed to cross the stream, and he dashed knee-deep into the water, but did not come out where the trail climbed up the bank on the other side. Instead, he stooped and crept under the overhanging boulder, and still wading in the shallow water, he emerged on the farther side, then stepping out on broad, slippery rocks, he disappeared behind a mass of grape-vines.

These tangled vines, hanging from tall trees quite to the ground and trailing and festooning the whole space between the gorge from side to side, completely hid the opening to a narrow cave. The rocks, washed clean by every shower, obliterated any tracks of passing feet. Had any one followed Dave Turpin to this spot, they would as surely have lost him there as if the ground had swallowed him up, as it literally had, for he was threading his way through the windings of the cave with five hundred feet of solid mountain above him.

Not far from the entrance, he came to a part where the soft, disintegrating stone had been artificially hollowed out,

making still wider the space which nature had already formed like an arched room. Here lay shining in the darkness the great copper worm from the still. High above, through a passage or crevice running slantwise toward the gorge, a little light streamed into the room, but the opening was so cunningly made by the wild forces of nature that no human being could ever have entered by it or known of its existence, for it opened toward the sky from a wall of solid rock so perpendicular and sheer that only lizards and creeping, clinging creatures could scale it, or birds of the air fly into it.

In this room he stood a few minutes, blinking and peering among the shadows, then gave a low whistle. No answer came to him.

"They hev be'n took," he said to himself in an awed whisper.

Then he went farther, following a narrow passage that led into another irregular room, almost a repetition of the first, only that it was lighter and airier. Here were barrels of corn whisky, hundreds of dollars' worth. Here also were many mountain-made jugs of coarse brown ware, rudely but strongly glazed, and carefully corked. These were the sort of jugs he had carried in his canvas-covered wagon into the low-country towns and sold secretly, many and many a time. Still no one appeared, and once more he gave the low whistle.

This time something stirred in the darkness of a sort of alcove beyond him.

"That you, Jim? Joe, be ye thar? Hit's on'y me, Dave. Come on out." He knew the Furman brothers would be together, for neither one was brave enough to

stir without the other. They were desperate in a fight, but cowards when pursued by an unseen danger. "Aw, don't ye be feared. Th' officers is gone, an' nobody but me lef' to keer fer the dade."

"Who-all be dade?" It was Jim Furman, the husband of Ellen, who spoke and came slowly out from the hole where he had hid when he heard Dave enter. "Come on, Joe."

"Who-all be dade?" repeated Jim.

"You knows Sally be dade. Lury say you put her on the bade fore you run. An' now Lee Bab lies thar by the door, shot plumb th'ough the heart."

"Who-all of them damned officers done hit?"

"Gawd knows. I jes' come an' found him thar, lyin' side th' do' cl'ar plumb dade, an' th' ol' dawg stan'in' guard oveh him like a human, an' heap betteh 'n some humans I knows on. Come." Dave turned on a run toward the entrance, but the two men stood still. He looked back. "Wall, stay thar till ye die stan'in'. I got no time fer sich. I got to keer fer the dade."

He dashed away, pausing for no further words, splashed through the stream and out from under the boulder, and was well on his way back to the cabin before the two men appeared. When they did so, each had taken a deep draft of the virulent corn whisky, which had done so much to make a brute of Lee Bab. They muttered and talked in low tones, as they slouched down after Dave.

"I'll lie low fer thet sheriff. I'll git my gun set fer eve'y one o' the low-down skunks as hev be'n houndin' we-uns," said Joe, slipping in drunken haste over the stones of the stream, and rolling over like a porpoise; then, sitting up in the water without attempting to rise,

he continued to mouth out his curses, until his brother had pulled him to his feet.

"Git out o' thar an' quit yore cussin'. Likely th' officers is skulkin' roun' heah, hearkin' to ye. Haish, will ye?"

When they reached the cabin, Dave had hurried to the Settlement to get help. The two men were too stupefied with their own liquor to know what to do, so they sat helplessly on the door-step and cursed, now at the officers, now at Ellen for having gone away without cooking something for them to eat, and now glowering at the dead in awed silence, waiting — they knew not for what.

Ellen Furman sat equally helpless in the doorway of "ol' woman Basle's" cabin, holding her heavy, stolid child in her arms. She was talking in a languid manner to some one, and Dave heard her complaining voice from a distance as he approached.

"Thar she be, settin' moanin' and fussin', hain't got the sense of a hop-toad." He drew near and stood a moment frowning down on her. "Whar's Miz Basle?"

"Thet you, Dave?" said the older woman, coming to the door and removing the snuff stick from her mouth.

"Howdy." He pulled off his old felt hat and stood a moment, swallowing back the lump in his throat.

"Howdy, Dave. Won't ye come in?"

"I cain't come in. Thar's death in the Cove. Ouah folks is all skeered skunks, plumb full o' licker, hid'n' an' leavin' ther dade fer a houn' dawg to keer fer, an' drive away th' hawgs. Lee Bab lies dade by the door, an' Sally —" he swallowed again and turned his back to the woman in the cabin, "she's lyin' dade, too, an' nobody to watch by her, an' no box to put 'er in."

At the mention of Bab, Ellen Furman threw up her arms with a shriek and sprang up, rolling her baby over in the dirt at her feet.

Dave rescued the child and thrust it toward her. "Quit yore hollerin'. Go in thar an' hide yore face. Yas, Lee Bab's dade, an' what be thet to you-uns? Likely Jim knows what be thet, an' we'll learn hu-come he dade with a bullet th'ough his heart."

"Jim hain't be'n thar sense the raiders come, and Sally drapped, an' Jim put 'er on the bade."

"Naw, ner you hain't be'n thar neitheh, nor you don't know what-all has be'n did." Ellen continued to shriek, and then added curses and threats to her terrible cries, fast growing hysterical. Dave seized her by the arm and shook her. "Haish yellin', I tell ye. Take yer kid an' keer fer him. Gawd! Miz Basle, cain't ye make 'er stop?"

"Ellen Furman, ef you don't haish, I'll take you in thar an' give ye sich a dose as I gin ye las' evenin'. Hear? Go in thar an' set," and Ellen obeyed. "I gin her a dose o' wormwood tea las' evenin' ontwel she rolled on the floor spittin', she hated hit so. Now, jes' you run oveh to Ross, an' he'll sen' down fer the coroneh an' a docteh, an' he betteh bring preacheh Price weth him. We-uns'll git together here at the Settlement and gin pore Sally a right buryin'."

"Whar's Lury?"

"She done gone fer Bill Hutchins to make a box fer Sally. I be'n keerin' fer the babe fer 'er."

"Thank ye." Dave turned away on a run, but a look in his face, drawn and pale, touched the woman's heart.

"Dave," she called after him. "Come 'long back heah."

He returned and stood hat in hand before her. "When hev you eat las'?"

"I plumb fergit. Yestiday noon, likely."

"Go in thar an' set. Ellen she be thet no-count, she cain't do nothin' but dip snuff an' cuss."

"Yas, she be right smart at thet, though," said Dave, glowering at her as he took a seat in the doorway.

The widow Basle moved alertly about and soon had coffee and corn-bread for him. "I see you was goin' to drap in a minute more. Why didn't ye tell me ye were perishin'?"

"I be thet worrited I cain' tell grievin' f'om hunger, seem like." He entered the cabin to drink the coffee, and took the corn-bread in his hand to eat as he walked.

"I reckon they be no time fer settin' now. You stop by an' ask ol' woman Hicks and Miz Hutchins to go up to the Cove; an' — well — I reckon you betteh ask Miz Deal to come heah an' keer fer the chillen while I go with 'em myse'f to see afteh Sally's layin' out. Ellen, she's thet no-count, she'd leave 'em perish, an' Lury nigh about sick, pore chile."

A feeble little wail from the bed in the corner called the good woman back, and Dave hurried on. He heard the sound of hammer and saw as he approached the shed where Bill Hutchins made rude furniture for the mountain cabins and coffins for the dead. He put his head in at the door and said: "The'll be need fer another box, fer Lee Bab's dade, an' I'm goin' now to sen' fer the coroneh." He ran on, not waiting for further exchange of speech in his haste.

The Settlement had taken the rumor of the raid and

the death of Sally in a vague, apathetic way, as something that did not directly concern them, but now the news David Turpin brought them was like a tonic administered to the whole village. There was much stirring about and interchange of gossip between the houses, and gathering together of knots of men here and there. All was mystery and wondering among them, for no one knew more than another. Even Dave could give them no more than the simple statement of what he had found, so that conjecture and rumor had to take the place of facts in satisfying their curiosity.

The women started up to perform their kindly offices for the dead, and some of the men wandered up also, for no reason but to see what they could. They dared not do anything until the officer arrived, and the jury had brought in their verdict; still there was much standing around and talking and chewing and spitting to be done, as they gazed on Bab's body lying pitifully there, "Cl'ar, plumb done fer."

After seeing a man started on muleback for Plainsville, the county seat, for the coroner, and talking a while with Ross at the store, Dave set out to find Lury. He returned to the widow Basle's, but she was not there. Then he set out again for the Cove, going by himself and avoiding the groups of men who were all climbing along the trail in that direction. By the merest accident, this desire to avoid the gossiping groups on the usual trails brought him suddenly upon her.

She was seated in the sun, with something in her lap, so engrossed she did not hear him approach. High above Cloud's Mill, off from any trail, in a nook well screened

by laurel, she sat, and Dave stood a moment and watched her before he spoke. To his amazement she was counting money, small silver pieces and nickels. He heard them clink as she picked them up and dropped them back in her lap. One or two larger pieces clinked with the rest, silver dollars and fifty-cent pieces.

"Whar 'd ye git 'em?"

He spoke quietly, but she started as if he had fired a shot and gathered her ragged skirt together, hugging it to her.

"Git out o' heah, Dave. You no bus'ness follerin' me." Poor, frightened child! Her pitiful face, wild-eyed and haggard, upturned to his, touched him.

He sat down beside her and put his arm around her trembling little body. He could feel her heart beat like that of a frightened bird. "I hain't goin' to tell on ye, Lury. Le's see what-all you got heah."

Then she spread out her skirt, and gathering the money up in her shaking hands, she thrust it toward him. "Take hit," she cried, putting it in his hands as he held them out to her. Then she turned to him with her face hid on his breast and sobbed aloud.

"Thar, leetle Lury, don't ye do so. Don't, leetle sis. I cain't take this. Hit ain't mine. Hu-come you by hit?"

"I done fetched hit—hit— Oh, Dave, Dave, I be'n gittin' hi-hit fer a year—more'n a year back—an' now maw's gone," she sobbed, with her face still hid on his breast.

He dropped the coins back in her lap, and naturally and tenderly he drew her to him and comforted her.

"Now how about this, anyhow? How about hit, Lury? Tell me 'bouts hit. Cain't ye tell Dave?"

"I be'n that mad at paw, I done watched all around,

whar the licker jugs be set 'mongst the bresh, an' when they — they — was all gone to the still — an' nobody roun' — I took the empty jug, and the money top o' hit, an' I filled hit up weth licker, and toted hit back, and kep' the money. Nobody didn't see me. I done drawed the licker out'n the bar'l, an' filled the bar'l up weth wateh, an' nobody neveh knowed the dif'unce."

"What ef somebody hed a-come on you whilst ye were a-doin' hit?"

"I'd jest gin 'em the money, an' go on an' make out like I was he'pin' 'em. I done that a heap o' times."

"Wall, I reckon this here money be yourn now. They's nobody got a betteh right to hit. Yore maw died, an' now yore paw's dade, shot th'ough the heart, lyin' beside his own door."

Lury drew her shuddering little body away from him and placed her hand over her mouth. Her eloquent eyes gazed horror-struck into his. "Dave — Dave — ye reckon the revenues done hit — or — ye reckon hit were — Dave — you neveh done hit?" she barely whispered the words.

"I neveh. I come back an' thar he lay dade, and the dawg watchin' by 'im."

"Dave — ye reckon hit mount o' be'n Jim done hit?"

"Look a heah, Lury, they hain't nobody done hit but the revenues, hear? They be nobody but the revenues to do hit. Don't ye neveh open yore mouth to nothin' else. Jes' all 't is yore paw's dade, an' the rev'nues done hit. Gawd! Ef you'd a-heared Ellen screach when she haered me tell 'at he was dade!"

"Ellen's be'n fool drunk ev'y sence maw drapped. Paw gin 'er licker, an' Jim cussed somethin' awful."

"They'll be a jury, an' likely they'll hev you fer one o' the witnesses, but you let on like you neveh hearn nothin' an' knowed nothin'. Whar you be'n hidin' this money? How much be they?"

"I cain't count hit. I be'n countin' an' countin', an' hit's always dif'unt. Sometimes hit's ten dollehs, an' sometimes hit's twelve, an' sometimes hit's no mo'n six, er maybe eight. I do' know how much they be. I hid hit oveh yandah. Come."

She ran lightly to a hollow tree and thrust her hand into a hole where squirrels had been wont to hide their treasure. "Look. You drap 'em in heah, an' thar you c'n take 'em out on totheh side, down undeh thet stone. I fetched the stone an' hollered out the hole so."

He put the money all back without counting it and replaced the stone. "Leave hit be thar ontwel the buryin's oveh, and all's done. Hit don't b'long to nobody but you, nohow, an' nobody hev the right to say nothin'. Go back to ol' woman Basle's now an' lie low. Maybe they'll fergit all abouts you, an' so you'll git shet of appearin' as witness. I know how things goes. Run home now an' take keer o' yore baby yore maw give ye."

So Lury went back as Dave bade her, and he continued his way to the Cove, much relieved in his mind, yet with a tender ache in his heart for the forlorn child. Down in the low country, children went about wearing pretty clothes, and yet they were not half so pretty in his eyes as this ragged, uncombed Lury. In clean clothing, with bright ribbons on her hair, what might she not be? "Pore leetle sis!"

CHAPTER VIII

"DAN'L M'CUNE HAS FEELIN'S"

In the dusk of that same evening, Daniel McEwen and the two young men returned to the cabin. The mountain man had led them a long tramp, and they had climbed about after him, until they were so thoroughly wearied that they were in no mood for the frolic they had indulged in before, as they stood washing off the dust and perspiration at the long trough by the well. As they leisurely toweled themselves, they could hear Daniel talking to Josephine in low, gentle tones, while he fed and milked her.

"I reckon you be'n lonesome heah by yo'se'f all day. Lif' you foot — so — so."

"Oddest old duffer I ever saw," said Barney. "I feel as if I had tramped a hundred miles, and he's as fresh as he was in the morning. If that's what 'mountain dew' does for a fellow, I reckon I'll try it."

"I reckon you won't. How about Peg, when you take to mountain dew? Take to hill climbing, fresh air, sleeping in the open, and all that. I herewith forswear houses, rooms, roofs — the wide canopy of heaven shall be my rooftree, the hilltop my bed, and the mists that curtain the mountain my —"

"Hush up."

"That's right, be discourteous and throw a wet towel over me when I rise to inspirational heights. I never did such a stunt in my life as this day's climbing, and here I

am still able to stand on my feet, — although somewhat wobbly, — and woo the muse. It's great. What shall I do with the towels? Hang them on the laurel?"

"I reckon so."

They dragged their weary feet to the cabin and took their blankets from their packs and stretched themselves on the ground where the sun had warmed it all day. When Daniel came by with his pail of milk, his smile was almost audible as he saw them both already sound asleep.

"Seem like they'd rutheh sleep 'n eat 'bouts now," he said.

Nevertheless he prepared a meal after his own manner, carefully and deliberately moving about his cabin and doing everything deftly and neatly. It was a good supper he set out for them and for himself. His cooking outfit was more ample than that in most of the mountain cabins, which frequently consists of but three utensils, — a frying-pan, a coffee-pot and a tin basin. Sometimes a big iron pot is added to these, in which pork and greens are boiled together.

When the young men awoke from their heavy sleep, the stars were shining out above them and the whippoor-wills were calling to each other across the clearing. For a while they lay quiescent in the entrancing night, starlit, and thrilling with low noises unheard in the day, — subtle, hushed noises, sifting through the dusk. They both felt the charm of it, and neither knew the other was awake, until Bob drew in a long breath. Then Barney raised himself on his elbow.

"I say, Bob, I'm hungry. How about it?"

"Why didn't you speak before? I thought you were

asleep. Yes, I'm hungry, but I could do without, if the old duffer is asleep. Reckon he is?"

"We'll see."

Barney rose and drew a match across his trousers; shading the tiny flame with his hand, he entered the cabin. Coals glowed in the big fireplace, and he threw on a bit of fat pine, and instantly a bright flame filled the spacious room with light! Bob followed him, and they both stood gazing sleepily about them as if they might find Daniel McEwen hidden in some corner, for he was not to be seen otherwhere.

"Gone," said Bob.

"Bed's not been slept in," said Barney, and drew out his watch. "It's not so late. He may be back. It's only nine o'clock."

"Here, light this candle. Got another match?" Bob made the circuit of the room with the candle and picked up a scrap of paper lying on the table, on which something was scrawled in pencil.

"Eat yore rations an' git in bade an' sleep like humans. I'll be back in the mawnin'."

"Well, now!" said Barney. "That means he has only one bed, and he has given it to us. He's gone so we will take it."

"Then take it we must, even if we would rather sleep in the open."

Barney went to the fireplace and lifted the cover from a great iron pot standing in the hot ashes of the hearth. A savory steam arose, filling his hungry being with joy. "Well, I say! He certainly is a host without a peer. Look here what he's done."

"Our rations!" exclaimed Bob with delight. "The smell of whatever that is in the pot is too much for me. Hustle. I'll pour the coffee, and you fill the plates."

They filled their plates with chicken and gravy, and found hot corn-cakes baked in the ashes, brown and sweet as only freshly ground corn-meal can make them. In a basin on the window ledge they found milk with sweet cream on the top for their coffee, — a rare treat for the mountains. They ate delightedly and to repletion, and they praised Daniel McEwen as one fit to be host to a king and a good chum into the bargain.

Then they covered the fire with ashes, but with the economy of labor usual among men, they did not wash the dishes, saying they could use them just as they were in the morning. They decided that there was enough to serve for them all for breakfast, even if their host should return to share it with them, so the rest of the chicken and even the coffee was left in the pots undisturbed. Then they each filled a cob pipe and sat late in the doorway smoking, then got to bed as Daniel had advised and slept until the sun was high.

They awoke to find him moving quietly about his cabin, setting out their breakfast as neatly as he had laid the table for their supper.

"See here! We can't have this, you know, — sleeping in your bed and turning you out of your own house, and making you cook for us! I say! Let us do for ourselves and hustle for a bed when we need it. Get out o' here, Bob Kitchel — you old —" But Bob was out and off before his friend could finish, and swiftly they prepared for another toilsome day.

"I reckon you fellers hed 'bouts 'nough mountain, time you got back las' night."

"We sure did!" said Bob, catching the twinkle in Daniel's eyes and laughing back an understanding glance. "How about yourself? I might have taken a few steps further, but not many."

"I hope you didn't have far to go for your night's rest," said Barney seriously. "You mustn't do that again, you know."

"I were n't huntin' fer no night's rest. I had to carry Josephine down to the Settlement, so she'd be right keered fer whilst I'm road-huntin' weth you-uns. I kin make out to leave feed here for the chickens, an' no harm come to 'em, — 'thout 't is a hawk gits one, — an' Bess, she goes 'long o' we-uns, but Josephine — she's dif'unt. Same's women folks is dif'unt f'om men folks."

"You mean you'll keep right on with us while we are laying out a course? Why, that's the greatest thing yet. We'll make headway so, if we accomplish all we did to-day."

Bob watched the smile hovering about Daniel's lips. "You think we'll hardly hold out to do that every day?"

"Sca'sely, but they be no need fer sich, to my thinkin'. Hit's the way in them towns you come f'om, but heah in the mountains we be feared to git too much done to wonst, lest we be th'ough too quick an' quit livin'. Seem like you-uns aim to put three days into one. Seem like you-uns cain't git th'ough soon 'nough, but we 'lows 'at that's doublin' up on life, like. Ef ye puts three days into one, you-uns be soon th'ough weth livin'."

"Well, you led yesterday. It wasn't our fault we nearly dropped dead by the way," said Bob.

Now the grim little smile around Daniel's lips became a genuine laugh, and the laugh cleared the atmosphere for all of them and brought with it a genuine kindly feeling.

"Naw. I was givin' ye a leetle o' your own medicine, an' ye took hit like men. Hit's easy fer me, but you-uns be raw f'om the low country. You be sof' like. Colts is that-a-way befo' they've be'n worked."

"You lead again. I'm willing; I'll go where you go. But see here. We're not imposing on any one — not if we can help it. I know how you people feel — some of you — about this road building, and as long as it involves no more real expense to the county, I'm willing to lay it out where you like, only I'm bound to get my grade right, see, or the committee will not accept my route, and that means loss to me — if they drop me and put another man on the job."

"Yer grade'll be all right — 'thout hit may be some windin', but ef them 'at 'lows to use hit is goin' fer to see the scenery, they'll see a heap mo' than they would ef you was to make the road straight up one side th' mountain an' down totheh, an' hit'll be a heap mo' gentle grade too."

"As soon as the route is laid out, there'll be a gang of men sent up here, and the work will be put through in a hurry. Your people may not like that, but it's up to them. They voted for it — the county did."

"Neveh you feah fer these heah mountains, ef ye folleh the trail I set ye. You be in hit fer th' money ye gits, an' I be in hit fer to see we-uns done fa'r by. That's dif'unt."

Barney's eyes flashed, and this time he touched the right chord in the heart of the man of the mountains — the one that vibrated.

"I have to be in it for the money, man. I've got a sweetheart off there where I came from, and I want to marry her."

"Wall, ef hit's money ye need fer sich — git hit. All I say is, don't wait ontwel some otheh man steps in afore ye. I have heard o' sich as that, an' hit's a heap o' trouble to a man." He threw this last bit of advice at Barney over his shoulder, as he walked out the door.

Then they saw him scattering corn for his fowls here and there, where they must go and scratch for it. Josephine was gone. He came back and helped to prepare the provisions they were to take with them, for they were not to return to the cabin until their work was done. Simple enough was their bill of fare, and skilfully he packed it, hanging the sacks in which he put it over the mule's back. In the sacks were the freshly ground corn-meal, salt pork strips, coffee, a little salt, and a little sugar. A small jug of molasses also hung from the saddle, and the coffee-pot, in which Daniel had carefully packed the fresh eggs from the scattered nests. This coffee-pot and a frying-pan were their only cooking outfit.

The men all walked, and Bess carried, along with the rest, the young men's kits. They bore on their own shoulders, as being too precious to trust with the rest of the mule's load, their few instruments and levels. Daniel had begun to like and respect his two young companions, and his own natural geniality and courtesy had completely won them. They had come upon him at the right moment, when he had been touched with human sympathy, and his emotions stirred by sorrow; and he had been awakened from his long, sullen brooding by his hatred and sudden

act of vengeance. He was no longer slumbering and existing only in the past. Action had cleared his brain. He had brought retribution on him who had wronged him, and then deepened the wrong by cruelty to her of whom he had robbed him.

In that act Daniel McEwen had liberated his own soul. He believed it to be a righteous act and felt no compunction. He had no thought of hiding to escape the consequences. It was, to him, simply an act of justice with which the laws of the land had nothing whatever to do. To be sure, there were those who might think they ought to pry into the matter and bring him to trial, but they were to be evaded. They were not to be blamed, since that was their business, but they were to be quietly set one side as superfluous. It was an affair between himself and Lee Bab, and the world had nothing whatever to do with it. It was justice.

His heart expanded, and he talked freely with the young men, and did what he had never done before for any one. He took them a short distance out of their course to show them his gold mine. He had found this little, gold-bearing pocket not far from the spot where he had come upon Lury that morning. He had worked it with great pains and labor alone, and none knew of it save Richard Hadley at the bank in Woodville, with whom he had contracted a sincere friendship. Richard Hadley and he, although in such different spheres, were kindred spirits, and they each recognized the fact.

With all his courtesy and apparent intimacy, however, he disclosed to the young men nothing of the mystery that hung about his life and almost nothing of his past, except

that he had lived on the mountain "nigh on to seventeen year." He also told them that his was the only well on the mountain, and that his cabin was built before the War of the Revolution, and that no doubt those who had come here then had fled to the hills for safety, but why he never knew. All had been dead and gone long ago. His father had bought the place at a sale for taxes and had held it a long time before his son had come to live there.

All this was mightily interesting to his two companions. They loved to engage him in talk. At evening, as they lay stretched on the ground rolled in their blankets, — for when the nights were clear, they avoided the mountain cabins, crowded for the most part, and close, preferring to sleep under the starlit sky in the sweet mountain air, — they would often listen to him far into the night. He never betrayed his neighbors, but his quaint humor and its application to human foibles, which he so well understood, was, to say the least, original. As a philosopher he was unique.

Daniel McEwen had indeed taken his cow to the Settlement as he had said, but it was not that alone which had called him down the long distance after his already hard day's tramp. He could have found a boy to take the animal for him, had he so wished. No, it was a tenderness in his heart which drew him, the desire to see little Lury, and to know what had become of her. He was touched that she had called herself "Sally Cloud" to the two young men when they found her in his cabin, and he knew well that she had purposely thrown them off the track, fearing they meant harm to himself.

He supposed she would be found at the widow Basle's,

as David had said he would take the women there, so to the widow Basle's he went. His long day in the hills with the young men had taken him far out of the way of the Cove, and he had heard nothing of happenings there, since he had left Lee Bab lying dead in the weeds. He did not care what was done, or what the gossip might be; but now his awakened heart clung to the child, who had looked up in his face with her mother's eyes.

It was late when he at last stood wearily outside the widow's cabin and gave a low call. She stepped quickly out and closed the door behind her.

"I reckoned you mount be 'long 'bouts now," she said.

"Who be in thar weth ye?"

"Ellen Furman an' Lury Bab. An' Lury hev the babe pore Sally lef' in the worl' behind 'er when she gin out an' died. Hev ye heard the news?"

"I hain't be'n afteh hearin' no news. I be'n trompin' the mountain, helpin' two young fellehs lay out a new road 'at's goin' to be driv th'ough ouah country up yandah. Likely hit'll go th'ough the Settlement, too, so ef ye be thinkin' o' sellin' to Bill Hutchins, like you was tellin' me a while ago, jes' you hol' on a mite. Land'll come up in price right quick, an' maybe ye mount be sorry you 'lowed hit to go too soon. Thought I'd drap 'round an' tell ye, hol' on to yer land a bit longer. Good evenin' to ye."

He turned as if to walk away. She stepped quickly nearer and laid her hand on his arm. "Hol' on. Don't go yet. I reckoned you had heard the news, an' thet were why you come down this-a-way. They is death in the Cove. Sally Cloud died, drapped jes' whar she stood — pore critter — tother day, an' she hain't buried

yit, and now Lee Bab lies thar side he's own door, and the coroner's jury's be'n settin' on him all evenin' an' cain't bring in no evidence, on'y jes' 'died by a unknown hand.'"

"What's thet you say? Lee Bab hev be'n sont to jedgment?"

"He hev."

"Hu-come he dade? Cuttin' 'er shootin'?"

"He come dade weth a bullet th'ough th' heart, an' the gun lyin' 'longside what done hit. The coroner hev th' gun now."

"Wall, so hit be. Live hard, die hard."

"We be gittin' ready for the buryin', me an' Miz Hutchins, an' Miz Hicks. Be ye goin'?"

"You knows I neveh hev no doin's weth th' Babs."

"Look a-heah, Dan'l M'Cune, hain't you no feelin's fer Sally?"

"I sure hev had, but she no need fer 'em now."

"I knows a heap mo' 'n I lets on, Dan'l M'Cune."

"I reckon so."

"I were weth her all night when her baby come, an' she tol' me a heap, an' she laid hit on my soul to tell no one on earth but you, what-all she tol' me. Hit be on my soul to tell ye."

"Wall, jes' you leave hit be thar fer a while, will ye?"

"Whar?"

"On your soul. I'll come to ye fer hit some day. On my life I will, I tell ye, but I'm cl'ar done fer now."

"Dan'l M'Cune, hev ye be'n drinkin'?"

"Not this day, Miz Basle, but ef I had a drap, I'd take hit. I be ready to drink an' drown myse'f, I shore be."

"I'll say nothin' now, but the day'll come when I will. Whar be ye carryin' the cow at?"

For the first time he mentioned the real purpose of his visit, and the widow showed no surprise.

"I done brung the cow down fer Lury, fer to feed the babe. Will ye look afteh hit fer her? I'll gin ye money fer yer trouble, hit shan't be no cost to ye. But you let on like you done bought 'er, will ye? I be no hand to tell my doins' all oveh the mountain."

"I reckon I knows you, Dan'l M'Cune. I'll do all I kin fer ye, fer I see you has feelin's. I done tole Sally you hed, an' I'm glad I did. I did'n' believe ye hed, but I tole her so jes' to comfort her, an' now I'm glad I did."

"Heah's three dollars fer the cow's keep. You let me know when ye need more, an' I'll sen' hit to ye. Look afteh Lury a bit, will ye? Whar's she goin' to stay at?"

"Ellen Furman say Lury's goin' back to the Cove weth her. She's skeered to live thar by herse'f."

"Them two be the chil'en o' Lee Bab, but they were hern too. Hit be no 'count me goin' to the buryin', but ef Sally'd lie easier in her grave on 'count o' me doin' this fer her, I'll do hit. They's nobody else I'd go so fer as to say this to, but you shore be a good woman, Miz Basle. I neveh be'n one to talk my business to no one. Pore leetle sis — run cl'ar to B'ar Waller, hid'n' f'om Bab, an' thar I found 'er, she settin' hol'in' the babe, an' cryin' 'er soul out. I took 'er home, fer I seed Sally Cloud in 'er eyes. Since Lee Bab hev be'n sont to jedgment, like you say, I'll make out to kiver my hurt an' do fer Sally's child. Whar shall I carry the cow at?"

"Gin me the cord, an' I'll tie 'er yandah in the shed,

an' gin 'er a leetle roughness to chaw on. I'd ax ye in, on'y fer fear o' wakin' Ellen an' settin' 'er to screachin' ag'in. She be'n takin' on that-a-way eveh since she hearn o' Lee Bab bein' killed."

Daniel thrust the money in her hand, and she put it in the bosom of her dress. "Thank ye, — I'll do fer 'er good. Jes' you try to leave licker alone an' git a leetle sleep. I see you be nigh about done fer. Good night." Her voice was full of gentle sympathy, as she took the leading rope from his hand.

"Good night, an' thank ye." She led the cow away, and Daniel started back on his long climb up the mountain.

CHAPTER IX

LURY'S RETURN

In the Cove at Dark Corner, life moved on in much the old way, not quite so riotously and violently, maybe, as in the days when Lee Bab held sway, but now in a disorderly abandon, since the presence of Sally Cloud no longer radiated an unconscious influence among them, shrilled over by the high, complaining voice of Ellen Furman, — ignorant, superstitious, and often drunken. She managed to dominate the brothers by her very weakness and folly, holding them through her own fears and mysterious terrors.

For a while Lury stubbornly resisted Ellen's demands and lived on with the widow Basle, but at last she returned, bringing the little brother with her and caring for him tenderly, with a sort of childish motherliness. After all, the Cove was hers; the cabin was hers and all that was in it, and also the cave full of corn whisky. This she well knew, as Dave had taught her, but at the same time she knew no other way than to live on there and let the brothers Furman ply their trade, giving her of her own only as she made demands for it, and then after much lying and continued assertions that they had nothing, and that the business was of no more worth since they were so oppressed by the law and hounded by the officers.

In truth they were no more molested than they had ever been. A whisky raid made the dramatic element of their

lives and was a thing to be naturally expected and hoped for from time to time, as it gave variety and the spice of danger to their calling.

During the months that Lury remained with the widow, Dave Turpin left the Cove and loitered for a while around the store of Compton Ross, helping in a desultory way. He even went as far as Woodville trying to find employment there, but he could not content himself in the low country. The ways of the young men he met there were foreign to him. The things for which he had been admired on the mountain counted for nothing there. None of them had fractious mules for him to break or train for the saddle. None of them cared for his singing or his leaping and climbing. How could they know that he could climb higher and tramp farther in a day than any man on the mountain?

At last, homesick and discouraged, he returned to the Cove in Dark Corner and took up his old, leisurely work of helping at the still and making intermittent trips down the mountain to sell their liquor. It was dangerous business, but that only gave it the greater interest and provided the dramatic element craved by humanity, and the need for daring dear to youth.

In Dave's mind there was nothing nefarious in the calling. It was the legitimate business of the Cove, and the government had no right to interfere with them; therefore it was only right that they should outwit the government. Why not? Dave Turpin, with his innocent face and clear eyes and captivating smile, was always successful. No one below dreamed that when his spirit was aroused he could become in one moment a daredevil reckless as

the wind. His voice was gentle, his manner kind, his body slender and muscular, and his movements as lithe as a leopard's. When he stood at the tail-board of his wagon, figuring his accounts in a way he had of long and short marks, — for he was ignorant of all the lore of schools, — when he stood thus, his whole body drooped with the graceful lassitude of a young Greek resting after a race.

When he came slowly toiling up the mountain with his return load, he walked easily beside his mules and guided them with low, sibilant sounds, half a sigh and half a whistle. They understood him. When he paused at his camping-places, he fed and watered them first and afterward cooked for himself. Usually he avoided the old highway, now the new automobile road, because he loved his own hill ways best, and because he did not care to have his mules troubled and frightened by the passing machines. Yet, by gentle persuasiveness and his own easy indifference to the panting vehicles, he soon had his animals so used to them that they allowed them to pass with the same nonchalant imperturbability as that assumed by their master.

Although he lingered on, Dave was not happy at the Cove. The woman who had taken him in and comforted him, when he came drifting past her cabin door one wet November day, a motherless, starving lad, who had fed him and nursed him and kept him as if he were her own brother in spite of blows and curses therefor, — she whom he had loved with all the fervor of his soul, was gone. The once cleanly kept cabin was now a disorderly, whisky-reeking hole, and he revolted at Ellen Furman's weak whining and insistent tyranny, her play upon the fears and superstitions of the men around her. Yet it was all

the home Dave Turpin had, and he stood by it for the sake of Lury and the babe.

Lury came walking up the mountain one day, leading Josephine at her heels and carrying the little brother in her arms. The poor cow pulled and lowed, trying to go to her old home, but Lury led her on, petting her and promising her she should go back some day. There, in the little lot, she tethered her among the old apple-trees and walked on to the cabin. She shrewdly guessed how she came by the cow, and she loved Daniel McEwen for what he had done, but she never opened her wise little mouth about it, and the village supposed the widow Basle had helped her.

As she entered the cabin, its wretchedness filled her with dismay. Ah, it was worse, far worse than she had ever seen it. After the cleanly home of the widow Basle and her neat habits, in spite of the inevitable snuffstick, Lury revolted at the appearance of the slatternly woman who now presided over the home that should be her own. From that moment began a quiet and secret warfare between the two, which burst forth in words only at rare intervals on Lury's part, and never on the part of Ellen, whose opposition took the form of sullen silence, or subtle innuendoes muttered sotto voce to the men of the household, and which grew at last into a covert and soul-destroying hatred.

Yet it was her own desire that Lury should return. Afraid to live there alone during the long absences of the men, afraid almost of her own shadow, she had haunted the Settlement and hung around the widow's home until she finally forced from Lury the promise to return the next

day. Now she was expecting her, yet she had taken no pains to set the cabin in order, seeking thus to impress Lury with the idea that she had been unable to work, and that therefore nothing had been done. As Lury approached, holding the babe close to her heart, walking past the hog wallow and along the beaten path to the door, Ellen sat in the doorway, chewing a snuffstick and eying her narrowly.

"I see you puttin' on a heap o' style these days, sence your maw be'n dade. I'd like to put on mo'nin' fer Sally myse'f an' w'ar black clo's, but I hain't no money fer sich. I'd like to w'ar shoes an' stockin's fer ev'y day, too, but I has to leave my feet go b'ar like po' folkses has to." She sat with her bare feet on the earth before the door and made no move for Lury to pass her. "You look nigh abouts beat out. You betteh set heah longside o' me an' rest a leetle fer the' 's a heap to do in thar. I be'n so weak seemlike I cain' do a lick."

Lury looked five years older as she entered her own door again. Dave had bought for her with the money she had hidden in the hollow tree a complete outfit of black clothing, including a black hat trimmed with a stiff black ribbon and a black rose. He had found these marvelous things in Woodville and had sent them to her because she had demanded that she should have new clothes and that everything should be black. It was imperative, if she wore clothing at all, that it should be mourning, so black it was.

"Lawsey me! You shore be a young lady now!" Ellen said enviously, as Lury crowded past her and entered the cabin in silence.

There she stood for a moment looking about her at

the disorder and dirt, holding the baby closer against her angrily beating heart. "Hain't ye no clean place whar I c'n lay him down whilst I fix up heah like hit'd ought to be?" she said.

Upon her mother's great mahogany bed in the corner the soiled bed clothing lay heaped just as some one had crawled out of it in the morning. There lay Ellen's child, sleeping heavily, his flushed face unwashed and his hair matted. Lury stooped and put her face close to the child's.

"Ellen Furman, you be'n givin' Buddy licker. Miz Basle say you'll kill a child the like o' that givin' 'im licker —'er make 'im a eejit one. You hain't got the sense of a half dade chick'n. Come in here an' take the clo's off'n that cheer. They hain't a place in this cabin whar I'd lay a child o' mine."

Ellen rose slowly and stumbled in, complaining as she moved. "Hit's this 'er ol' hurtin' in my side. Seemlike I cain' do a lick. Buddy, he's be'n po'ly an' don't do nothin' but screach an' holleh 'thout I gin 'im somethin' to make 'im sleep. Thar's the cheer fer ye. I don't guess you think a place what's good 'nough fer my baby'd do fer yourn." She sat herself heavily down and spat in the fireplace. "An' he hain't yore baby, neitheh. Hit's jes's good's lyin' to say he be."

"He be mine, I tell ye. Maw done give 'im to me, an' I'm goin' to bring 'im up right, like he'd ought to be. I'll lay 'im on clean places, an' when he grows big 'nough, I'll l'arn 'im how to wash hisse'f."

"Yas. You go down to Woodville an' tell what-all you tellin' heah, 'at that child's yourn, an' they'll spit on ye. I knows."

Lury stared at her in amazement for an instant, then turned without a word and began to gather up the cooking utensils from the fireplace, where they had been left unwashed from one meal to another. Ellen watched her leeringly.

"Ye betteh leave 'em like they is," she said. "They be 'nough to do 'thout washin' them things."

But the girl worked away, scraping off the encrusted leavings of many meals. Then she scrubbed them clean with sand, as she had seen Bob Kitchel do. It was a new way, and it interested her. All the rest of the day, when the baby would let her, she worked thus, trying to make the cabin look a little more as it had when her mother was living, as Daniel McEwen's had looked when she was there, and as she had seen the cabin of the neat widow Basle.

As time passed, many causes came up to arouse the envy of Ellen, and none more potent than the fact that the village people had told Lury that the place and everything in it were hers. Dave Turpin had told her that Ellen and her husband were only allowed to live there because they were kin to Lee Bab. Lury carried things with a high hand and never seemed to think a reply necessary when Ellen complained that they were being turned out of their rights. Lury appropriated the great mahogany bed to her own use, making it up as she had seen her mother make it in the days when Sally Cloud moved quietly about the cabin, taking gentle care of the home.

That first evening of her return she told Ellen to prepare the supper for the men.

"I cain't do a lick," said Ellen weakly. "What you layin' out to do, anyway?"

"You kin do a lick. I'll tell Jim on ye. Ye be'n drinkin' all day an' lyin' 'roun' givin' Buddy licker. You git supper whilst I wash Buddy. I don't care ef he do screach."

So Buddy was washed, and the supper was cooked, and for the first time in many months the men came home to find food laid on the table for them, and sat down to eat it, instead of carrying what they could pick up out of the cabin and taking it away to eat as they sat around the still in silent discomfort. Now they were comforted by the change and sat around the cabin door afterward, and smoked and talked awhile and admired the baby, now grown plump and fair and ready to smile at any smiling face.

Lury talked about him and showed him with pride, and all the time Ellen's envy grew and ate into her heart.

CHAPTER X

THE KING'S HIGHWAY

TIME passed swiftly and brought changes to the Settlement and on the mountain along the line of the new automobile road. The work was pushed rapidly, and gangs of men forged ahead, clearing the old King's Highway, cutting down trees and saplings that had filled the old roadbed with obstacles, hauling gravel and sand, and building concrete culverts where once fords were considered good enough for crossing the streams. It was a period of active work for Barney O'Harrow.

At last the broad highway swept smoothly along, curving among the hills and climbing — climbing — twisting and turning, until it rose to the top of the ridge where the old mail coach used to labor heavily, and where passengers used to watch warily for the bad places in the road, and get out to help extricate a wheel from the mud, now and again, or walk up a steep ascent to ease the team.

Times were changed since that old highway was first made over the mountain by hardy pioneers, who often faced dangers from lurking Indians, or stealthy panther, or prowling bear, — dangers long since forgotten. Then they carried their corn on their backs and foraged for meat with their long-barreled rifles, with flint and steel and powder flask, bringing down sometimes a wild turkey or an antlered deer.

Times were changed since families, taking refuge from religious persecution, had fled warily along in companies, seeking a place where they might establish themselves and worship according to their own understanding of God and right, unhurt therefor and unhindered.

Times were changed since desperate, lawless men of crime had fled from their fellows and justice, to hide themselves in holes and caves, to live by depredations on those who dared live honorably, even though themselves fugitives from persecution. Indeed times had changed since noblemen and "gentry" had fled from jealousies and their enemies in kings' courts, from political animosities, or from those who hated them for loving humanity enough to uplift the afflicted and downtrodden.

And times had changed since the descendants of all these had become a people set apart but still keeping among themselves their original caste lines, — some traveling in luxurious coaches over the old King's Highway to visit the cities and taste the gaiety of the towns, to learn the styles in dress, or mayhap to place their children in schools; while their neighbors slowly drifted into deeper and deeper ignorance, living in their old traditions and gradually losing all interest in the world below them, becoming at last content to merely exist, in unschooled isolation.

And again times had changed with the War of the Revolution, which called back from their places of refuge many now glad to fight for the new land and their own freedom, leaving those who had no reason for such a struggle to live on untouched by the surging forces that were making for progress below their heights.

And still other changes had come when another war called many down from their isolation to suffer in the cause of progress which was being wrought by the Almighty without their understanding the significance thereof, — when soldiers invaded their seclusion and marched in weary companies over the old highway, climbing on foot and struggling to get their artillery and baggage over the mountain passes, now nearly impassable through neglect and indifference.

And now at last, what a change indeed had come upon the old King's Highway! Now, with no straining horses or struggling oxen to pull them, without smoke or steam, strange vehicles glided swiftly over the transformed highway. Beautiful coaches, some closed and curtained, like pretty little parlors on wheels, and filled with dainty people, some wide and open, filled with laughing, happy folk, had replaced the coaches of the olden days, which used to lumber heavily over a rough, uneven way.

And the people who filled them, how gay they seemed, and how carefree! Some, with ruddy cheeks, rode bareheaded, with hair flying in the wind; and some wore floating veils in lovely hues, and closely tied bonnets, out of which their faces shone like flowers set about with a silken calyx. Beautiful coaches of many sorts, — they glided swiftly around curves and over ridges, up the hill and down the hollows, climbing, ever climbing, and then descending, twisting and turning, now up, now down, but ever descending, to the plains below.

Where were they all going, these people, every day — passing and repassing, seemingly never stopping, just going, going, going. Where? And why?

So questioned Lury Bab in her wondering mind — the same Lury Bab who had fled to B'ar Waller in terror and anguish that dark, stormy night when Daniel McEwen had found her and taken her to his cabin, and fed and comforted her. Outwardly all seemed changed on the mountain, at least along the line of the highway, but in reality the changes had hardly been appreciated in the old haunts, so well had Daniel kept guard over the real secrets of the hills.

The little gold mine was unknown, and the hidden still where Bab had made his deadly moonshine was hidden as before. The life of the people of the hills drifted on in the old way. Bab's death had never yet been avenged — although slumbering elements were unforgetting that it had not been and it was generally accepted that an enemy had found him out and had killed him for some perfectly good and quite private reason, and that his death was but merited.

Daniel McEwen lived serenely his even life, and the eagles still had their nest in the lap of the overhanging crag. He sat in the evenings and watched their circling flight. Whether he brooded as of old over the thought of his lost love, who might know? He never mentioned her name. She had gone out of his life, and her death had been avenged, and he sat alone with his memories.

Yet Daniel McEwen was not an old man. He, indeed, had interests in life now he had not had before he took Barney O'Harrow that long day's tramp over the old King's Highway. He had become a man of greater importance on the mountain. His word was law in his community. He had saved his neighbors from intrusion,

and he only could guard them from mischievous civil authorities who had, in their eyes, no natural right among them or over them.

Down in the low country, Daniel McEwen's judgment was respected, and he was looked upon as one who might be depended on to keep the wilder element around him under control. For these reasons, in the field of politics he was considered to be one who could carry his ticket to success, and his name had been proposed for the State Legislature, but toward this end he would take no step. He still sat in his doorway and smoked his pipe and smiled, and watched the circling eagles.

Still time passed, and the Settlement began to be known in the low-country towns along the automobile route as an interesting place to stop and view the mountain people in their native conditions; even as humanity in general likes to hunt out curious vagaries of their own species, merely for the sake of entertainment. "You know," they would inform each other, "if you are going to motor across the mountains, you must be sure to stop at the Settlement. It's so typical, half-way up, and where you see the oddest specimens of humanity —"

Consequently the Settlement soon ceased to be really typical, although their neighbors below them still thought it so. For the lowest of their class, the most degenerate and forlorn, began to hang about the formerly self-respecting community for what they might pick up and gain by the very spectacle of their forlornness, from the more tenderhearted of their inquisitive visitors, thus adding to their own degeneracy and taking one step lower on the descending scale of humanity.

In the same way those who held their independence dear resented, in a quiet way, the intrusion of the world below and the fact that they were regarded as human curiosities by those who should be simply their fellow beings. Therefore they ceased to frequent the village as they had formerly done, visiting it only when they needed supplies, passively ignoring their inquisitive invaders, and soon taking themselves off to some favorite haunt or camping-place where the curious-minded would not intrude. By degrees they ceased to feel at home in the village which had once seemed peculiarly their own. Why this should be they themselves could hardly explain.

Compton Ross still kept the village store, and their corn was still ground at Cloud's Mill as regularly as of old. Those who formerly lived in the place lived there still, but the land had increased in value, as Daniel McEwen had warned the widow Basle it would, and a few here and there had sold off their little patches. Strangers of a humble sort had come to build small homes, and the atmosphere was slowly changing.

The real people of the mountains, however, remained distinct, aloof, following their own pursuits according to their own notions, as if oblivious of the strangers, yet quietly, tolerantly, and even at times amusedly observant of them. So also the secrets of the hills remained secret, locked in their sequestered hollows by nature's barriers and set apart by their inaccessibility from all but hardy climbers on mule back or on foot. The happy travelers of the old highway flew along the now widened and smoothly graded road, winding and doubling, climbing and descending, regarding the beauties of the hills now from this point

of vantage and now from that, looking down on tumbling streams which had once been fords and out along the way that stretched before them like a broad ribbon of rich red Pompeian velvet twisting among the green pines and past giant chestnuts, on over the crest and down again to the plains below. Then they would say: "We have seen the mountains."

They had indeed seen the mountains, the surface of them, and for these it had been enough — quite enough. To see understandingly is given to but few and only to those who search lovingly, whether it be in the heart of the hills or in the hearts of humanity.

CHAPTER XI

THE SISTERS

Saturday, from early morning until late into the night, was the one great day when the country people from all over the hills came to the Settlement to barter and to meet kinsfolk, to gossip and hear the news. Hence Saturday was the great and busy day for Compton Ross at the store. It was the busy day at the mill, also, for there they brought their weekly supply of corn to be ground for themselves and for their neighbors, and if they could not be persuaded to leave it from one Saturday until the next, the old mill must grind at a lively pace all day long and sometimes far into the night. There all the evening long a crowd would collect, waiting for their little bags of freshly ground meal to be loaded on to their mules behind them or placed in their wagons.

To the more law-abiding and timid of the community, Saturday was also a time of terror, and the women kept to their houses and admonished their children to stay at home in the evening; for the mountain men brought their liquor with them, and what they did not bring, they could easily find. When it was time for the sun to set, and they should have been well on their way home, many of them were recklessly tearing about the village, seeking for trouble and usually finding it.

Many an old grievance was summarily and primitively

settled in front of Ross' store or on the roads from there to Cloud's Mill. It had always been thus, and the opening of the new automobile route through the village made little change in this respect. On Saturday, as of old, the big white-oak tree in front of the store always sheltered the usual number of tethered mules and canvas-covered wagons and drowsing oxen under its wide-spreading branches.

One of these Saturday afternoons, late in October, a shabby livery carriage driven by a loquacious old negro arrived at the Settlement from Woodville and halted under the wide-spreading oak, along with the other antiquated vehicles. Two pleasant-faced ladies, surrounded by neat hand-bags and valises, occupied the carriage, and they leaned out and peered around in an interested way at the store, the country people, and the little cabins and frame houses clustered near by and scattered about among the hills.

"Well, Caroline, how does it seem to you? What's the name of this place, driver?"

"Place name Settlement, ma'am."

"Settlement? Has it no other name than 'Settlement'?"

"Not as eveh I heared on, ma'am."

"Well, Caroline, does it seem to you that we are called to stop here?"

"I don't know as I should say 'called', Elizabeth — but — is there a school here, do you know, driver, or a church?"

"Naw'm, I don't reckon they is any sich as that heah. Hit's on'y jes' sorter a settlement, ma'am — not regular, so to speak, a town, ma'am."

"I see. Well, where there are people, there should be a church, and where there are children, there should be a

school, no matter what the place is; and I see plenty of people and children, too. Yes, Elizabeth, I should say 'called' — anyway, to stop and look into it."

"It does seem so. Where do people generally stay, when they come up here, driver?"

"They doesn't mos' gen'ly stay, ma'am. Dey gen'ly comes heah an' goes on th'ough, ma'am."

"I see. This is one of the places that are passed over. Then, Elizabeth, we must be 'called.'"

"Likely so. Go on a few steps farther, driver, and we'll make inquiries at the store."

So the two decorous, sweet-faced ladies stopped at the store and gave their names, Elizabeth Graves and Caroline Tabor, to Compton Ross, and made careful inquiries as to some place in the village where they might reasonably expect to find board and lodging. Compton Ross lifted his bushy red eyebrows and drew his heavy shock of dull red hair vigorously forward to meet them, as if thereby to increase his cerebral activity, and produced a pencil with which he scratched his ear to further help his cogitations in a difficult matter.

Two or three men lounging against the building joined in the consultation, and together they verbally canvassed the whole village, arriving at last at the obvious conclusion, known to them all from the beginning, that the right and sole place to go to was the home of Mrs. Deal. She had had her brother, Bill Hutchins, the carpenter of the village, build a room on the side of her little frame dwelling for the express purpose of taking boarders, should any individuals be minded to brave a short stay at the Settlement. This she had done with admirable foresight, in spite of her

neighbor's derision, as soon as she learned that the new road was to pass through the place.

"Miz Deal's takin' bo'dehs" had been for some time a standing joke in the Settlement, and as no one had yet qualified for such a position in her home, and as any one in the village showing such thrift and foresight was instantly stigmatized as "uppish an' big feelin'", her room was the last to be mentioned as a possible and very doubtful stopping-place for the kindly sisters.

This settled, the ladies were driven down a red, muddy bit of street across a rapid, stony, little stream, up the bank on the farther side, and a short distance along a laurel and weed-bordered road brilliant with autumn leaves and goldenrod, that seemed to saunter irregularly about through the village, to one of the few neatly painted houses. The new room was conspicuous by its aspect of newness, being still unpainted and glowing with the warm sunlight color of new pine boards. When they entered the room, they found it sealed throughout with the same yellow new pine and exclaimed at the pleasant odor of pine resin.

"Now I should call this a plain leading — to find such a room as this, all new and waiting," said Caroline happily, setting down her hand-bag with a certain air of proprietorship, while her sister interviewed Mrs. Deal about board and lodging.

Mrs. Deal was loquacious and pleased. She was a delicate looking woman, who had once been pretty but was now pinched and careworn. Her hands were hard with labor and her manner eager, but her demands were not great, and the sisters were glad to accept her terms without demur.

"We'll take the room and board for a week, anyway,"

said Elizabeth, not wishing to commit herself to a longer stay until, with New England caution, they had tested the quality of the place in general. After a week, they would know whether they were really called to bide here, or to move on.

When the week was past, they had made their decision, and there they established themselves. Before a year was gone, Behold! not only were they still renting the room of Mrs. Deal, but out of their limited means they had purchased a patch of ground near by, and Bill Hutchins was building them a small, four-room house, very cheaply. Opening off from it was to be a large room, well lighted and generously designed, with fireplace and broad hearthstone, and furnished with pine tables and mountain-made, splint-bottom chairs, among which were two big rockers and two settles, one on either side of the fireplace.

Then there came a day when their limited store of household goods was hauled up by mule teams from the nearest station. Two wagons carried all their possessions, which included a good cook range and a sweet-toned cabinet organ. Few and very simple were their household goods, but simple also were their tastes, and their demands upon the world were few indeed. Very small were their resources, and their income was slender.

In their younger days these two sisters had kept a private school in a little New England village; then Elizabeth had married a young minister and had accompanied her husband to India, where they spent a few years in privation, teaching and giving their lives for the love of God and humanity. At last, after ten years, Elizabeth returned. She had left in India all she loved,—her husband and her little son in one grave.

Bowed and broken, she came to live with Caroline, and the neighbors said of her: "Elizabeth will never be herself again." They were right, for Elizabeth Graves had become through her experiences such a woman as they had never known before in that narrow, little, New England village. Bowed indeed for a time, she arose from her weeping and began her life anew. She taught in her sister's school and carried the burdens of life for her. Continually she gave out power and love, and her spirit became like a deep and wonderful pool, reflecting in its calm, clear depths the heavens in their beauty of the daytime glory and the stars of night. So Elizabeth ceased to be herself and became the stronger of the two, and her sister came to lean upon her.

Together they labored and taught and helped in all the village needs, yet saving a little here and there by excessive thrift. Then Caroline developed a cough, and the village doctor stepped in, and the neighbors also, and said Caroline must not stay any longer in the New England climate. No, she must go to Colorado — to Arizona — to California — New Mexico — anywhere, but go she must and at once. But to go so far cost money, and they had very little.

"We will go south," said Elizabeth. "We may find some place where we can be just as useful as we are here. This may not be a trouble; it may be a leading."

"If we can find a place where a school is needed," said Caroline. "We might write a few letters here and there; we must have a friend or two somewhere in the southern mountains. The doctor says it is essential that we go to mountains."

"Yes, but I can't seem to think of any one. I don't

really know where my old friends are. I don't know where they all went — the ones who no longer live here —"

"Of course, Elizabeth. Remember Dick Hadley?"

A faint red overspread Elizabeth's face and mounted to the roots of her hair. Just a soft, rosy glow it was. Caroline did not see it and continued without waiting for a reply: "He went South and to the mountains. He had a cough. Now, let me see. I did know where he went — it was near the mountains, if it wasn't right in them. He got well too. I'll write to his sister Hattie — she married a Briggs — you remember them all, I'm sure. He used to be at our house so much, but it must be twenty years now. No wonder you forget! It was just after you and Howard left for India that he was taken with that cough — and, well — Hattie said he was very bad with it — but I saw her a few years ago, and she said he had quite recovered and had married a lovely woman and settled down and had three children and was making money. Well, how time does fly. I'll write to Hattie —"

"So do. Richard Hadley must be an old man by now."

"How you talk! He can't be any older than you are, or only a year or so, anyway. I'm only forty-nine, and you are five years younger than I, and I don't call myself so old. He can't be more than forty-six or seven at the most. We both dress old and act old, but it's only a way we've got into. I'll write to Hattie to-day."

"So do," said Elizabeth again. And the letter was written. Other correspondence followed, which resulted in the arrival of the two sisters in Woodville and a little later their establishment in the Settlement.

CHAPTER XII

SCHOOL OPENS

"LIZZIE!" As the days passed in their new home, warm, sunny, invigorating days, the unconscious little formalities of old New England, which had kept them calling each other always by their full, dignified names ever since the return of the younger sister from India, began to drop away, and without giving the matter a thought or reasoning about it in the least, the sisters began to call each other by the names they had used in childhood. Once again they had become Lizzie and Carrie — homely old nicknames, but lovingly intimate as in the former days.

"Lizzie! We've made a mistake to bring all these books down here." Caroline was seated on the floor, sorting books from the boxes in which they had been packed and laying them out for her sister to place on the new pine shelves prepared for them. "Now, weren't we foolish? Look at this! 'Beginner's French.' 'Beginner's Latin.' 'First Lessons in Geometry.' And here's a Latin lexicon!"

"Why, that's all right, dear. It's not likely they will have such books down here, and we will have to loan them ours."

"Elizabeth Stowell Graves! What are you talking about? Do you suppose there's a child living within twenty miles of us who will want to borrow one of these books? More likely we'll have to use the little money we

have left in hiring the children right here in the village to come in and learn their letters. We should have brought primers."

Elizabeth laughed merrily. "Of course! And we haven't a book with us younger than the Third Reader. Well, we'll have to fill up our fine new bookshelves with these; they'll do for that, anyway."

While the sisters talked and worked, there came a rap at the house door, and Elizabeth stepped through the little passage between the large room and the house. She went with hope in her heart, for she had told Compton Ross the day before to send her any children or their mothers who would like to go to their school, and how little the lessons would cost, and what an advantage the school was to be in the village, and he had gravely promised that he would send them all the children he could. Maybe he had sent some one.

But the smile on Elizabeth's face died away as she looked on her morning's guest, for Ellen Furman stood before her, making her usual appeal of forlorn helplessness, and for the time being the appeal was successful. The good sisters would learn in the course of their labors who were worthy and who were not, but as yet merely the sight of wretchedness stirred their warm hearts to sympathy and loving effort.

"Why — how do you do? Won't you walk in?"

Ellen looked down at her shoes loaded with the red mud of the hills, for it had rained during the night, and the paths were wet, and the wet brambles had caught and torn the black skirt Ellen wore, which dragged on the ground in the back and swung several inches high in front.

"I reckon I cain't come in, I be that kivered weth mud.

The roads is mighty slick an' hard trompin' oveh the mountains, long daoun six or eight mile I be'n trompin'. Seem like I neveh would git heah, an' I has a hurtin' in my side seem like hit neveh will git well. I thought maybe you-uns mount know somethin' what mount he'p me a leetle, sence Miz Basle say you-uns is knowin' eve'ything she eveh hearn on, an' I hev done took a heap o' med'cin, but they hain't nothin' seem like eveh hev done me no good. An' doctehs hain't no good, neitheh, seem like —"

"Well, now, you walk right in and never mind the mud. That's a thing we can always get rid of, mud is. Where do you live?"

The visitor had a way of beginning each long-winded speech with energy and then subsiding to a dismal, weak, monotonous whine as she droned on.

"I live yon' way up th' mountain; hit mus' be eight mile f'om heah, an' I hev be'n walkin' eveh sence early mawnin' ontwel I be like to drap. I be that po'ly I cain't eat nothin' much, on'y jes' leetle tast' o' apple, what I eat whilst I were trompin'. I got to sell somethin' to git money fer them as I lives weth, they be that pore an' good fer nothin', cain't earn nothin', ha'dly, on'y to raise a leetle corn or sich, an' co'n-meal is too heavy fer my stomick seem like —

"Well, come in. Never mind the mud. You can scrape most of it off on the scraper there. You say corn-bread is bad for your stomach? Well, we have a very good baking of white bread, and when you go, I'll give you a loaf for yourself. Who do you live with, did you say?"

"Wall'm, I lives yon' way up the mountain, an' my ol' man, he's a-drinkin' man, yas'm, and my baby, he's sick

mos' o' the time, an' ef we could git to live by ouah-se'fs, we mount make out to git on right well; but thar's kin-folks of my ol' man's what lives weth us, an' hit be like to kill me to git on weth 'em, they is that low-down good fer nothin', neveh do nothin' fer nobody, jes' lay roun' an' git me to work fer 'em like to kill myse'f an' slave fer 'em, no' count girl an' that boy what her maw took up; an' now she be dade, an' he hangin' roun' yit. Seem like I cain't bide jes' to look at 'im, an' she got that baby, an' hain't mo'n a baby herse'f, but she make out to boss the hull on us, puttin' on airs like her maw done give the baby to her, but hit be fer me to keer fer, an' her too —"

"I don't seem to understand."

"Naw'm, they don't nobody un'stan', seem like. Her maw died, and she took the baby, an' she do say hit be hern. Hit be jes' like I tell you-uns. So I come down to see did you-uns wan' to buy a few fraish aigs, 'case I be 'bleeged to sell some fer to he'p out a leetle, an' git med'cin' fer my baby, he be thet po'ly, an' her paw, he were shot dade right by he's own doeh, and found lyin' thar weth th' bullet th'ough he's heaht, and the gun tho'd down at he's feet like somebody had shot him so an' then spurned him fer a dawg. Yas'm, hit were awful, an' I know who done hit, fer I done hearn him say a heap o' times he were goin' to do hit, but I hain't sayin' nothin' on 'count I be that kind-heahted. I don' 'low to 'cuse nobody but jes' leave the Lord chastize 'em fer what they done ef so be they done hit —"

"Why — that's an awful thing you are saying against some one — unless you are sure — a dreadful accusation, you know."

"Naw'm, I don' 'cuse no one, fer I hain't sayin' nothin' only jes' I be sure like I done seed 'im do hit, yas'm, but I don' say nothin', fer I hearn the preacher say a heap o' times 'at the Lord he likes fer to take vengeance hisse'f an' don' wan' nobody do hit fer 'im. Ef the Lord gits mad at ye fer sin, ye mount as well lay down an' die, fer the' hain't no gittin' shet o' the anger o' the Lord, like preacher Price say at the fun'l, so him what done hit, the anger o' the Lord'll strike 'im, an' he'll be come up weth, so I hain't sayin' nothin', jes' lyin' low waitin' fer the Lord to strike."

Now Elizabeth Graves suspected that the poor creature had been drinking from the stale odor that pervaded the place after she had closed the door and her guest was seated, so she busied herself with making a cup of coffee for her. "I'll give her one wholesome meal, anyway," she said to herself and asked her no more questions.

"I have right fine fraish aigs, ef ye like to git some."

"I'll buy them, certainly; how much are they?"

"I reckon I has twelve heah; maybe they is fo'teen, but you-uns kin have 'em fer fifteen cents, like I says, hit's jes' fer to git a leetle med'cin' fer my baby. I has twenty-five cents, an' fifteen; thet's what hit costs, maybe ye mount like me to fetch ye down a chicken some day, 'er a leetle pig; hit's right fine to have one 'roun' ef ye likes hawg meat in winter. We has ten leetle pigs, an' hit costs a heap to feed ten, mo'n we git f'om co'n bilein' —" She stopped abruptly, as she did not mean to explain just how their own hogs were fed with the leavings of their sour mash, then continued the steady, monotonous strain of her peevish whine: "We cain't raise 'nough on ouah leetle patch o'

co'n fer feedin' ten hawgs no way, so I thought I'd make out to sell one, ef so be you-uns'd like to buy one —"

But the sisters did not care to buy the pig; they arranged to have a few chickens brought down to them, however, and sent the woman away with a loaf of sweet, white bread after giving her a good dinner with coffee. After she left, the good women aired the room well, and then sat down to their own meal and talked the circumstance over.

"What awful thoughts such women must have! Did you hear what she said about the Lord's taking vengeance? Carrie, just think of imagining that God takes pleasure in revenge!"

"But she may not have been in her right mind, Lizzie. Let's hope so, anyway."

Then Elizabeth laughed. "Well," she said, taking off her glasses and wiping away the tears of laughter, "it's a relief to be able to laugh after such a visit as that. To think of you sitting there and calmly hoping a woman may not be in her right mind."

"Well, I don't know but what it's the most charitable way to look at it, when a woman calmly sits there and says she is waiting for the Lord to strike. I should think she would be afraid the Lord might strike her. I'm beginning to see one thing, Lizzie. We must do something more radical than what we're doing. We can't sit here and wait for scholars to come to us; and if they should come, they wouldn't have a cent to pay toward their tuition, no matter if we asked them only a penny a day. I see that we'll have to go out into the 'highways and hedges' and gather them in."

"'The laborer is worthy of his hire.' We must not take

another cent out of the bank, or we'll have nothing left before the year's gone. Do you know how much we have left?"

"I don't care how much we have left. 'The Lord will provide.' If it's His work, He'll take care of it and us, too."

"But Carrie, we can't go on pauperizing this community."

Now it was Carrie's turn to laugh. "Who pauperized it before we came here? I think if we go on in the same line, we'll have to invest in a whisky still. That's what's done it in the past. Laziness and drunkenness, that's what ails this community, and it's so beautiful here that it wrings my heart to look out on these hills, 'Where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.'"

"If 'The Lord will provide', we'll have to ask help. We must find out who the preacher is she spoke of and get him to coöperate with us. Or we might connect ourselves with some missionary board, and —"

"Lizzie! I don't want any board back of me! I may be foolish, but I feel that I don't want any board, who know nothing about conditions here, dictating to me."

"Well, then, I don't see that there's anything left for us to do but to trust in the Lord," said Elizabeth, with a sigh.

"Like the old woman who broke her hip jumping from the sleigh, when the mare was running away down-hill. 'Why did you jump?' said her neighbor. 'Why didn't you trust in the Lord?' 'I did till the breeching broke, and then I jumped,' she said. I don't know but what I feel like that old woman, — that it's time we jumped, even if we break — the bank."

Then they both laughed, for they were a merry pair, for all their difficulties.

"I don't know but what you're right. Maybe the Lord means us to jump, but I do hope He'll see to our landing — somewhere. I don't mean any harm, Carrie, but I do feel that we ought to see our way a little clearer before we touch that money, or —"

"Not touch that money at all, dear — only jump. I mean to write to Peg Kitchel. You know, even if we used every cent we have in the world, twenty-five hundred dollars would not go far for what we need here. Now would it?"

"Of course! Peg! But I should want to be very sure there was no self leading there, Carrie. She may be abroad. They're always going abroad. That's how I met them first — coming home from India — and she was only ten years old then. What a wonderful thing to have so much money you don't know what to do with it!"

"I'll write to Hattie Briggs to-day — Hattie Hadley that was, you know. Her sister-in-law is Peg's stepmother. Peg's a dear. She always was, and she'll be glad to do a little good. She must be twenty-one by now, so her money is in her own hands. Why, Dick Hadley may know where she is."

"Yes, dear. So do. I'm going over to the store soon, and I'll post the letter."

It was Monday and a dull day at the store. Elizabeth found no customers there but one little boy, buying snuff for his mother. She stopped him and asked a few questions, merely to get acquainted with him.

"Why! Have you hurt your foot?" The little fellow was limping, and one big toe was tied up in a rag.

"Yas'm."

"How did you do it?"

"Do' know. Hit jes' come so."

"It did! Well, see here, do you like candy?"

"Yas'm."

"Why, that's good; so do I. What kind do you like?"

"That thar kin'." He pointed shyly to some huge sticks lying in the little glass case on one end of the counter; eight inches long and at least an inch in diameter they were, of red and white peppermint. She paused, undecided whether she ought to present the child with so large an amount, no doubt to be devoured immediately; then she compromised.

"When I was a child, I used to like this kind of candy." She pointed to the smaller sticks in a glass jar. "Now, which would you rather have, six sticks of this, or one like this big one?"

"I reckon I'd ruther hev this 'n."

"You would! Well, you shall have it. I'll get two of them, and you shall have one, and I'll take the other, and when I go home, my sister and I will divide it. Have you any sisters and brothers?"

"Yas'm."

"Somebody sent me a big box of oranges last week. If you'll wait a minute while I do my buying, I'll take you up to my house and give you one. Will you?"

"Yas'm."

As she walked to the farther end of the store, she spied a brown paper parcel, partly opened, and knew it for the loaf of bread she had given to Ellen Furman. Why was it there?

"Have you any white bread?" she asked innocently.

"Here's a loaf of right good bread, jes' come in," said Comp Ross. "We don't keep white bread as a gen'l thing, hit's slow sellin'. Jes' happen's so we hev this 'n."

"Oh! Well, how much is this? I'll take it."

"I cain't rightly say how much I'd ought to ask fer hit, fer hit were lef' in trade. She lacked ten cents o' gettin med'cine fer her baby, and she asked would I take the bread in change, and I t'uk hit. Seem like hit'd ought to be ten cents."

"Very well. I'll take the bread. What kind of medicine does she get for her baby?"

"She git this here sleepin' med'cine. They do say hit's right good fer makin' chil'en sleep whilst they're worrysome gittin' their teeth. I gin hit to my baby oncet, an' she slep' the hull night th'ough, but they do say hit be bes' not to gin hit to 'em too often, jes' foller this 'ere readin' on the bottle; an' hit's all right, an' good med'cine, too. Anythin' else, ma'am?"

"If any of your customers do weaving, will you send them to me? I want to get some good homespun for curtains. I'll take a bottle of that medicine, too."

Then Elizabeth hurried away, with the little boy hopping along at her side. She had learned something. She had bought back her own loaf of bread and had purchased a bottle of soothing syrup, neither of which she wanted; and she had learned the name of the woman who had visited her that morning and where she lived, and had made the acquaintance of the boy at her side. Already she had begun to go out into the "highways and hedges."

"Carrie, this is Billy Finch. He's going to have one of

those oranges that came yesterday. Have you any brothers and sisters, Billy?"

"Yas'm."

"How many have you?"

"Nine." The sisters looked at each other in dismay. There were only a few oranges left.

"Nine? Are they all at home?"

"Naw'm. They hain't nobody thar on'y me an' Sis."

"Oh!" said Caroline. "Then you must take one to Sis. Now, some day you must bring your little sister to see us, will you?"

"Yas'm."

Then Billy Finch took his departure, limping away well content. Truly the rest of the children were gone out of the Finch home, for all were married and living in Plainsville or up the mountain, as their mother later told Elizabeth. Only the two little ones were left, and soon they were enrolled as pupils and the school opened.

CHAPTER XIII

DAPHNE

LATE that afternoon Ellen came slowly dragging up the mountain and found Lury seated on a rock beside the trail, her little brother playing about her feet.

"What you doin' down this-a-way fer? Whyn't you stay home an' git supper? Here I be mos' dade fer somep'n' to eat, hain't had nothin' sence mawnin' — what you done weth Buddy?"

"Ellen Furman, you no business w'arin' my clo's down to th' Settlement. I know'd you'd got 'em, an' I done come down here to tear 'em off'n you. I 'a' mind to do hit now. Look at you draggin' my dress in mud an' briehs. I 'a' mind to pull 'em off'n you an' leave you go home b'ar, an' I will, too."

"You tech me, an' I'll whack thet baby. I'll whack 'im good. I'll —" She lifted her hand and stooped toward the child as if to strike, and he ran toward his sister, crying in terror.

"You tech 'im, an' I'll kill ye. See how he's cryin' jes' to look at ye. He be like th' res' on us, — cain't bide the sight on ye. Thar, Honey-Son, sisteh won' 'low 'er tech ye nor look at ye. Haish, haish. You 'low to make yorese'f look decent w'arin' my dress an' hat an' shoes, does ye? You come draggin' up th' mountain slow as a

lame hop-toad. Ye looks like a sick yaller cat. You take off my things, an' neveh you tech my baby long as you be livin'."

"Did'n' I tell ye haish up 'bouts tellin' 'at thet chile be yourn? Ef ye tells down to Woodville 'at thet chile be yore baby, they'll spit on ye. What-all you doin' half-way down mountain? Hangin' 'roun' the new road watchin' fer to see them city folks rid'n' up an' down. I knows what you up to, — luggin' thet chil' weth ye, like ye had no shame. Whar be th' men folks?" Lury did not reply, and Ellen walked on, muttering.

For a moment Lury stood watching the clothing David had purchased for her being dragged in the dirt and carelessly trailed over brambles and wild briars. Poor girl! She had done all she knew how to do in her ignorance, and the problem of her life was becoming too hard for her. She did not know how to cope with her wily and sullen persecutor. She was now a tall girl, and the clothing she had kept carefully and worn only over to the little church where Preacher Price held forth every other Sunday, three miles away from the Cove, had lately been appropriated by Ellen and hung on the woman's lank figure in weird disarray.

"She think she hev a right to ev'ything I got. I'll git me a box an' lock my clo's whar she cain' git 'em. I'll make Jim gin me some o' my money, an' Dave'll git me some new ones. She'll hev to w'ar these 'at she hev tore all up. I'll neveh tech 'em ag'in, sence she hev wore 'em. They be no good now."

The wearing of her clothes was not all that Ellen did to trouble Lury. Of late she had begun making vague remarks about knowing something which she could use to

get David on the chain gang, if she were not so kind-hearted. Sometimes she would leer at the girl and say:

"You put's on a heap o' airs, but ef ye went down to Woodville, ye would'n' know what struck ye. Nobody'd speak to ye nor look at ye. They is some at th' Settlement knows what you be, too."

These vague insinuations Lury felt to be sinister, but did not comprehend their import. Now if it were not for the little brother toddling at her side, clinging to her finger, she would wander away somewhere, — she did not know where, — anywhere to get away from those who monopolized her home and were beginning to ignore her and treat her as if she had no real rights there but were only allowed to remain on sufferance. She did not know her own power, and they were trying to keep her from discovering it by a sort of intimidation. Ellen's method being a skilful use of fear, she caused Lury to dread some evil that was likely to fall on Dave, unless she were very discreet, or on herself if she tried to go where she would be out from under Ellen's domination.

In spite of David's attempts to enlighten Lury by telling her the Furmans had no right in the place, she did not know how to rid herself of them, for they were there long before Lee Bab was killed, and it seemed as if it were the natural order of things and must go on indefinitely. She was like a bird in a snare, and whichever way she turned, she seemed to beat her poor wings in vain.

The air was soft, and the autumn leaves were dropping quietly around her. She settled the baby on a mossy mound, where he would be away from the prickly chestnut burrs, and gave him acorn cups to play with, while she

searched for the scattered nuts, dropping them in the bag over her arm. She was not far from the new road. Ellen was right in saying that she liked to linger near it and watch the wonderful machines go gliding by. She loved to make stories about them and tell the stories to Honey-Son. She would hear them humming afar off like a low purring of the wind among the pines, and the fascinating sound would come nearer and grow stronger, and she would snatch up the little brother and run with him to her point of vantage where the road showed clear before them in two directions. There she would watch them pass and glide swiftly on into the unknown.

Now as she disconsolately searched for the thinly scattered nuts which had been loosened by an early frost, she lifted her head and listened. Far away up the mountain she heard the low humming without the throb of the engine, for from that direction the machines only coasted. Hurriedly she snatched the child in her arms and ran to her point of outlook.

"Thar, Honey-Son! Thar, hit be a-comin', the gre't big hummin' bee. Heah hit hummin'? Hark now. Watch how hit come a-flyin'! Some day a gre't big bee shore will come 'long here, a-buzzin' an' a-shootin' down like a chick'n hawk a'ter a chick'n, an' hit'll jes' grab we-uns an' —"

Before she could get any further in the story a loud report caused her to leap with fright and clasp the child closer, to run with him out of danger — somewhere — anywhere. As she stood thus poised for flight among the goldenrod and crimson autumn leaves, a girlish laugh made her pause. The machine stopped, and two men got out and walked around it. Then the girl who had laughed alighted.

"It serves you right, Bob. Now you'll have to stop a while and let me get some leaves. That's what comes of being cross. Help me up the bank, will you? I'll get them while you and Barney jack up. Have you a pocket-knife? Have you, Barney?" She turned from one to the other.

Lury watched them, fascinated. She knew those men. She had seen them a long time ago on the mountain. Yes. They were the same men. She had lied to them. They must know it now. What would they say to her? Instantly she panoplied herself in her armor of inscrutability.

Then the girl spied her standing there, the slant rays of the declining sun glorifying her mass of dusky yellow hair, her glowing skin, and warm brown eyes, surrounded by autumn foliage of russet green and gold and red, against a background of somber, deep brown, shadowy woods. She still stood poised for flight, with the beautiful child in her arms.

The young woman caught her breath. "Look," was all she said, with a swift wave of her arm toward Lury. The two men paused and looked, then all three climbed the bank and walked toward her. It was as if they were inevitably drawn to approach a picture so wildly beautiful.

"Why, you are Sally Cloud, aren't you?" said Bob Kitchel, with a smile.

The smile reassured her, but she said nothing, only nodded her head. Then the three stood before her dumb. Each searched in his mind for some reason why they should have climbed up there to thus gaze at her, and each knew it was because of the singular beauty of both herself and the child. But to put such a reason in words would have been

impossible and foolish; moreover, she would not have understood.

It was Lury herself who broke the spell. She arrived all in a moment at the very sane conclusion that she would tell the truth and brave the worst. It was the kindly, sympathetic look in the eyes of Bob Kitchel which worked this marvel in her mind. It was to him she had lied first that day. To him she would make reparation.

"I done lied to ye, that time," she said, fixing her eyes on his and ignoring the rest. They were all silent, and she caught her nether lip between her teeth to keep it from trembling and then went bravely on. "I were skeered on ye. I were skeered ef I tol' ye my right name, ye'd know who I were, an' ye'd make me show ye whar my paw's still were at, an' my paw'd kill me fer hit. An' — an' — I were skeered ye mount want Dan'l M'Cune fer some devilment, an' — an' — you'd git 'im an' put 'im on th' chain gang. Thet's hu-come I tol' ye what I done."

She took a step back and lifted her head proudly. She did not take her eyes from Bob's face.

"And is this your little brother, — the bundle we saw rolled up on the bed?" he asked, coming forward and taking the little one's hand; but the baby pulled it away and hid his face in his sister's neck.

"Hain't nobody goin' to hurt you, Honey-Son," she said and held him closer.

"How perfectly darling!" cried Peg. "You boys go on and fix the machine. I'm going to sit here while you do it." She dropped among the goldenrod and looked up at Lury with an irresistible smile. "Let's sit here and watch them. Shall we?"

Slowly Lury settled herself on the rock near by, and Peg loosened her bracelet and dangled the pretty jewel before the baby's eyes. "Babies always like this. Look at these dents. My baby cousin made them with his little teeth."

The child took it gingerly in his hand, but kept his eyes fixed on Peg instead of looking at the bracelet. Lury's face lighted with a smile as she settled him on her knee and watched him admiringly.

"He's a perfectly beautiful baby. What's his name?"

"I jes' calls 'im Honey-Son."

"But he has a name beside that, hasn't he?"

"Naw'm. He hain't nobody, on'y me. Maw done give 'im to me."

"Oh," said Peg, unenlightened.

"What were you-uns shoot'n' at when ye stopped thar?"

Peg turned a mystified glance on the girl. "Shooting? We were not shooting."

"Oh! I thought I hearn a gun."

"Oh, that noise? It was a tire bursting. That's why we had to stop. See? They are lifting the automobile so they can put on another."

Lury gazed eagerly down on the two men at their work. She was forgetting her shyness. "When that thar thing done bust, do hit jes' go off that-a-way, 'thout hurtin' nobody?"

"Yes. It makes us stop until we can put on another, that's all. How old is your little brother?"

"He be nigh about two y'ar ol' now."

"Do you do everything for him yourself? Make his clothes and all?"

"Yas'm."

"And you haven't any one to help you? Well, I think you are clever. I couldn't make a baby's dress. Do you buy them, too — earn the money for them — his clothes, I mean?"

"Yas'm. Ev'ything yon' way to our place be mine. Ef they make out they hain't goin' to gin me the money what I has to hev, I jes' gin 'em word I'll skin 'em alive."

"Oh," said Peg again, still unenlightened and more curious.

"Yas'm. They-all puts on a mighty pore mouth. I reckon ef they could git shet o' me, they'd do hit quick. Leastways she would. I'd 'a' be'n pizened plumb th'ough ef lookin' could 'a' done hit, an' Honey-Son, too."

"Oh, my!" cried Peg, astounded. Her friendliness, so unfeigned and girlish, loosened Lury's tongue, and she opened her hurt and lonely heart to this beautiful one who had come to her out of the wonderful far-away, like a spirit which had swept into her wild life on a swift breeze from heaven. "How dreadful to have to live with people like that! Who are they?"

"They be kin to my paw, but they be no kin to me."

"But can't you get away and live with some kinder, nicer people?"

"I don't guess I could. Hit be my place — an' I reckon I ruther live thar. I cain't turn 'em out 'thout I'd hev nobody to bide 'long o' me, an' they'd hev nowhar to go. I reckon th' hain't nothin' fer me to do, on'y jes' worry along like I be'n doin'."

"But haven't you any friends — any kind friends?"

"Why — yas'm, I has Dave. He be right good."

"And is he kin to you?"

"Naw'm. He hain't no kin. He were a love chile. I wisht I were sich, fer my kin shore be mean to me."

For a while Peg sat looking off into the distance. A bright red spot burned on one cheek, and her eyes had a luminous mist in their dusky depths. The men were engrossed in their work, and Lury watched them with eager interest.

"Look, Honey-Son, what them men a-doin' a-poundin' on the gre't big hummin'-bee." The little fellow stood on the rock on which they sat, his head, haloed with sunny curls, close to his sister's, peering shyly over her gorgeous oriole of sunbright hair. So delicately alike they were, and Lury's face was so transformed with the smile which lightened it when she turned her attention to the child, that Peg found it hard to connect her manner of speech with the personality which her face and carriage indicated.

"A strange little waif," thought Peg, and her heart became quickly tender and sympathetic, more than merely curious. "Tell me a little more about Dave," she said. "Does he live with you? What does he do?"

"Yas'm, he live weth we-uns, when he livin' anywhar. Mostly he go down country sellin'."

"Oh, do you have things to sell? What do you sell?"

Instantly a change spread over Lury's face. She had forgotten herself and been incautious. What did he sell, indeed! All they made at the Cove was corn liquor, and Dave's only business was taking it into the low country and selling it. Neither of the brothers Furman would have dared drive down into Woodville or Plainsville, or anywhere else where Dave was in the habit of venturing,

to sell Dave's load, and they were absolutely dependent on him for the disposal of their product. Hence, while they jealously watched him and in a way feared him, they felt themselves helpless without him. Surprised at her silence, Peg turned and looked full in Lury's eyes, and saw there that strange barrier of inscrutability, only now it was coupled with an open look of defiance.

For an instant Peggy was baffled, but she met the look with a smile, and the smile won. Gradually Lury's expression changed, and she smiled back at her, a hesitant smile that only quivered about her lips and then faded.

"We-uns has a heap to sell, — hawg meat an' sich like. I be'n gitt'n' chestnuts fer 'im to leave yandah to the store at th' Settlement, fer them as comes by like you-uns buys 'em. I reckon they likes 'em."

"Of course we do. We stuff turkeys with them at Thanksgiving."

Lury's eyes opened wide with surprise. "Does turkeys eat sich es thet? I neveh seed turkeys eat them nuts."

Peg laughed. "No, I mean we boil the nuts and stuff the turkeys with them when we roast them. It's good, I can tell you."

"I neveh heered sich es thet. Hawgs eats 'em an' gits right fat on em, too."

"Dave isn't the only friend you have, is he? It's so good to have friends. A girl like you ought to have some friends who are different from those people who live with you."

"Dave live weth me when he live anywhar. He be right good to me an' Honey-Son. I reckon Dan'l M'Cune, ef he know'd I needed 'im, he'd be right friendly, too.

But I hain't need'n' him nor nobody, — fer I neveh baigs fer nothin'."

Lury stood up, her chin lifted in an ungirlish pose, her back straight as an arrow, more like a wild young princess of the hills than the sorrowful, harassed Lury of an hour before.

Barney came springing up the bank. "All ready," he shouted, and held out his hand to help Peg down, but she knelt beside the baby boy, putting her arms around him.

Lury stooped to him and took the bracelet from his tightly clenched fingers. "Give the lady the pretty, Honey-Son. Hit hain't yourn. Give back the pretty."

"Now, isn't he good to hand it right back so?" cried Peg, clasping the bracelet around her wrist. "Isn't he a love? Barney, couldn't they ride a little way? Is there a place we can turn to bring them back again?"

"Of course there is," said Barney, radiant to please. "Come on, boy! That's it!" he lifted the little fellow to his shoulder, but the child stretched his arms out to his sister, and his lips quivered pitifully. He was too frightened to cry aloud.

"He sich a baby! He won't 'low nobody tech 'im but me an' Dave." Lury snatched him to her breast. "He hain't goin' to hurt you, Honey-Son. What you skeered fer? Sisteh won' 'low nobody tech you."

"But wouldn't you like to ride a little way — just to see how it goes? They'd like to ride. Don't take the baby, Barney; he wants his sister."

"Naw'm. I reckon we'd betteh be git'n' home. Hit's nigh sundown. I has a right smaht piece to go, an' he walks so slow I has to carry 'im. Good evenin'."

They stood and watched her slender figure slowly climbing the hill slope with easy swing, the fair baby face looking back at them over her shoulder.

"That girl is the most fascinating imp I ever looked on," said Bob. He had been watching the scene from where he stood beside the car.

Barney smiled as he offered his hand to Peg. "I believe I recall some such remark. Who was the lady you compared her to then? Daphne? She was the most forlorn looking little reprobate you ever set eyes on. He thought of making a poem to her and immortalizing her as Daphne, while she stood there in rags and lied to us in the most imperturbable way you ever saw."

"Couldn't you make her come along?" said Bob.

"She isn't the kind you could make do anything," said Barney. "I imagine she is the one who does the making where she goes. I don't know what her name is yet."

"Well, call her Daphne, then."

They returned to their car, and looking back from her height above them, Lury saw it glide away down into the creeping dusk and sighed wistfully.

"I wisht I had of dar'd," she said.

CHAPTER XIV

PROVIDENCE INTERVENES

THAT evening the sisters sat by their open fire in the large schoolroom, which was so cosy, in spite of its generous proportions, that it had become their living-room. Here, each on a settle on either side of the great stone fireplace, with a table between them, Elizabeth always served their evening meal, with pretty china and a tea-set of solid silver. This tea-set was a relic of Elizabeth's wedding. It was always kept shining, and it was always used.

Carefully Caroline affixed a slice of bread to the large meat fork, which she had wired to a slender hickory wand, making thus a handle so long that she could reach the coals in the fireplace without burning her hands.

"I don't know but that I'm glad the evenings are growing cooler, so we can feel justified in having a fire like this." She held the bread cautiously toward the heat and turned it now and again, to have the delicate brown of the toast just to her taste. "It is funny to think of your buying back your own bread for ten cents."

"It's worth that not to have to bake again to-morrow."

"And yet you were so disappointed to find it left there after you had given it to her. There's nothing so funny as folks."

"I know, but to have it thrown back in your teeth, so to speak, — "

"Where would you have it thrown if not in your teeth, being bread? Now you butter this while it's hot, and I'll take my tea now, if you'll pour it."

Thus they chatted and supped, their quaint pleasantry and quiet laughter seasoning with kindly piquancy their simple meal of tea and buttered toast, dates, and an orange.

"I'm so glad we got that letter off to Peg. If she wants to do good, here's her chance — with all the ignorance — Oh, dear! But there; it isn't for us to dictate to Providence. We're here, and we'll do our part according to our light, and that is what some of our neighbors are doing, even if they are ignorant, like Mrs. Basle. You know I take real pleasure just visiting with her. I did yesterday."

"Yes, and tired little Mrs. Hutchins, that all the neighbors are so willing to criticize because she wants to live decently."

"Yes, and why shouldn't she? And Mrs. Deal, too. I like to see a bit of thrift somewhere, even if she does ask a cent a dozen more for her eggs than they do at the store. If we only had a little more ourselves, I'd never grudge her the cent."

"No, Lizzie, we aren't so poor — as long as we can afford to give our bread away and then buy it back."

"Never you mind! If Providence intervenes, we'll be able to do more than give a loaf of bread away now and then, even if mistakenly. Sometime we'll know who is worthy and who not. I hear an automobile, — or is it the wind rising?"

"I don't think it's the wind; it's too steady. It's stopping. Why, it must be right at the door."

"Now, Carrie, come back. I'll go. The idea of your

running out in the night air, after sitting close to the fire, making toast."

Elizabeth threw a gray, knitted shawl around her head and went to peer out. Perhaps it was only a belated party seeking a chance to stop over night at the Deals. It was still softly dusk and light enough for a machine to skim along without illumination.

"They're coming in here, Carrie. Why, Peg Kitchel, you dear! Why, Bob! Why!"

"Barney O'Harrow, my friend, Mrs. Graves."

"Your friend, Bob. Why, Mr. O'Harrow. Why — come right in." The sisters spoke together, incoherent with eager welcome. "How did you know we were here, Margaret? Why — this is the most wonderful thing — I can't tell you — we were just speaking of you."

They all entered the big schoolroom with a breezy rush, and the two sisters were promptly hugged by Peg, and kissed, and looked over, and then Barney was presented more decorously.

"What a wonderful room — and the fireplace all of stone, and so big and old-timey, and having tea by it — I want some. I'm hungry. It makes me hungry just to look at it. We've had a fine lunch, so I ought not to be, you know, but I am — Barney — There'll be time for us to make Woodville to-night, if we stay a little bit, won't there?"

"Of course there will be!" exclaimed Elizabeth.

"Lizzie, you don't know anything about it; but what's the use of making Woodville to-night? All stay here."

"Oh, we can't pile in on you like that. We were just going through, and Peg wanted to stop. So we did. You

know Peg — she always runs me, and she would run my friends if she could."

"Bob! I don't, do I, Barney? Isn't this just the cosiest thing — this settle close to the fire? Listen, Bob. Now you are going to do just as I tell you, aren't you? You know you are our host on this ride, and Barney and I are your guests. Mr. O'Harrow, these are the very dear friends I've told you about all my life."

"All your life! Two years. You've only known Barney two years."

"All my life — I've talked about Mrs. Graves, and ever since I was nine years old she has been my Aunt Elizabeth."

"You said you had told Barney about her all your life, and I said it's only two years."

"Aunt Elizabeth, Bob hasn't improved at all. He quarrels just the same."

"Well, now, that's good. I'm glad he hasn't changed. You'll all stay, won't you?" Elizabeth turned to the stranger. "It would be so hard to let you go to-night, and this is such a pleasant surprise. Carrie, you take their things, and I'll draw some more tea. This is cold."

Barney settled himself on the seat opposite Peg. "I would be delighted to stay. I would jump at the chance to stay here awhile. It all rests with Bob." But Barney looked at Peg. "And with you ladies, of course. I am at your service."

"Which means they are at ours," said Peg, "but I'll help. I can."

"Yes, Margaret. You always helped. How did you know we were away down here?"

"Uncle Dick."

"Yes, of course. I might have known. I sent a letter to you only this noon by him, in his care, I mean."

"Bob's going to bring him up sometime, in the machine. Has he ever been here?"

It was a happy time for the sisters. They stepped lightly about, and preserves were brought in from the house part of the building, and cheese, which Barney toasted with the bread, and more china cups were set out, and a long, long talk followed to which Barney listened quietly, glad to be included in the circle so loved by Peg.

He learned much as he listened. How Elizabeth had first come into Peg's life. How, — a motherless little girl, traveling home with her bereaved father and her brother, only a little older than herself, she and Bob had wandered hand in hand about the ship, — a quaint, dark-eyed little wisp, lonely and mischievous, because there was nothing to occupy her active body and brain and no one to direct her except the sorely tried little brother, or to care what she did so long as she kept out of the way.

Childless and lonely herself, Elizabeth had noticed the children, and all the mother in her supremely motherly soul went out to them. She hunted up the father, a sick man wrapped in his own ailments and griefs and worried about his little ones, but wholly unable to cope with the problem they presented. Soon the problem was solved for him, just as the problems of most of the incompetent ones are solved, by the strong, helping hands of the capable and wise ones, who go about the world soothing their own griefs by carrying the burdens of the weak.

As Elizabeth said many times to her sister after her return: "Why, what would I have done if it had not been

for those forlorn little things, and there never was a sweeter girl than Peggy, and Bob stepped right into my heart, — not in Ned's place, of course, but just as near to it as another child could get."

The father, willing to shift responsibility, naturally turned the training and education of his daughter over to Elizabeth, and for a long time the sisters' school was her home, until at last, in the competent and businesslike sister of Richard Hadley's wife, he found another wife to carry his responsibilities for him.

Thus it came about that the children were brought home, and the kindly sisters lost track of them. When their father finally laid down his last burden, the care of his immense inheritance, and left it and the two children to his wife, she, like the thorough-going business woman she was, secured the services of her brother-in-law, and under his guardianship, made over to each child his own share. Then, accepting her own part, she said: "I've done my duty by them, and they are of age and able to look after themselves, — they should know what's proper brought up as they've been, — I'll make my own life now and live it as I like."

So again they were set adrift, but this time with a fortune, and Richard Hadley became to them "Uncle Dick." Thus it may be seen that it is not only the "lame and the lazy" that are provided for. No, it is sometimes the case that the well-doing of previous generations makes a smooth and safe path for those who follow. Such an ancestor was their maternal grandfather, — a careful money-getter, but Godfearing and just; and it seemed that their fortune would remain and increase until some spendthrift descendants should arise and scatter it to the winds.

Barney O'Harrow knew all this, but the sisters who had played so large and beneficent a part in their lives he had never met. Now he watched and listened with amused interest. Of course he loved Peg; who wouldn't? But proud and poor, he would like to eliminate the fortune and take her on equal terms with himself, or less than equal — for in his eyes he should be the greater in fortune and all else. His wife should be the one to look to him for favors, not he to her.

Whether he would ever be able to humble himself enough to accept conditions as they were, he had not yet decided. He could adore, but he could not bow down. He had the ideals of manhood imposed on the youth of this nation. His Irish parentage had in no wise destroyed them, for his father had fought and made his own way and expected his son to do the same. He knew nothing of European ethics, — and would have despised them if he had, — of the man's right to his wife's body, soul, and fortune.

No, Margaret Kitchel seemed as high above him as the moon, and she sailed through a clear ether far beyond his reach, where he could give her nothing, make no place for her, smooth no way for her, — where he could only come into her life as an intrusion walking humbly in her wake, with nothing to bring her but himself — a mere nothing, weighed in the world's balance with her millions. But, being a live, vital spark — head up, clear-eyed, proud-hearted, sweet-souled, — a bundle of energy and nerve, — how could he slink at her heels and bask in the luxury of her wealth!

Dear old Bob, somewhat tainted with philosophy, to whom because of his easy circumstances idealism was easy, had different estimates of the values of life and knew only

too well what the world in general had to offer to his sister. He had managed to steer her quite successfully over the dangers and pitfalls of life abroad, where her gaiety and grace and winsomeness and wealth had attracted many admirers, and had brought her back to America in safety, as he thought; but what to do with her now he did not know. It did not occur to either of the young men that she might possibly have the power to do with herself — what neither of them directed.

So, after the two young men had retired to the new pine room in Mrs. Deal's cottage for the night, they talked it all over.

"I'm mighty glad we stopped here," said Barney; "I've always wanted to know those two women, they've meant so much to you two; and now I can see why. I wish I had had such friends when I was in the making. It would have meant the world and all to me."

"While you were in the making! What are you now? According to my philosophy, we are always in the making."

A fire had been built in the small, sheet-iron stove in the room and was giving out a terrific heat. Mrs. Deal had done her best to be hospitable, "according to her lights," as Caroline would have said. Bob was lying on his bed, in his pajamas, smoking.

"I can't stand this heat," cried Barney irritably, "and the smudge you are making, combined. Can't you sleep at night without smoking and talking philosophy?" He rose and opened the window with a bang.

"Thank you. I've been wanting that opened for some time."

"Then why didn't you open it?"

"I thought you would, if I lay still a few minutes, and I was right. Have a cigarette. You'll like the smudge better if you make a little yourself." Barney hurled a pillow at him and knocked the cigarette to the floor. "Very well, if you like to take it that way, I'll light another. Now listen here—you surly old curmudgeon. Lie there in your corner and smell the pine, — oozing from the new pine boards, — and drink in the health-giving odor of the hills, and hear me talk."

"If my shoes were not loaded with red mud, where we stood around fixing up that old machine of yours, I'd throw them at you. Go to sleep."

"Sleep is a fickle, mythical creature who has to be wooed, as one would woo the muse or the maid you love."

"Shut up."

"I say sleep has to be wooed, and I'm wooing. Shut up yourself. I'm thinking of my sister, — and so are you, —or you wouldn't be so unmitigatedly nasty. Some men are always so when they think of the one they love and would fain entice into their homes. I often wonder what sort of companions such men would make and how they would serve as a daily diet."

"Bob Kitchel — I — I value your friendship — or — I —I'd kill you. If you are thinking of your sister, let me tell you I've no thought of enticing her anywhere. She'll never have a daily diet of me. Shut up, and let me sleep."

"I'm afraid you're an awful fool, Barney."

"I tell you I'm not fool enough to think of your sister. Good night. I'm going out to sleep on the hillside — if I can." He gathered up his blanket from the bed and started for the door.

Instantly Bob was all contrition. "Aw! Come back, old man. I say! I'll shut up — anything you say — only — just you try to understand — I find it hard to talk to you, you are so darn proud — but you know — I tell you, man, I'm troubled about Peg. There's always some one dangling after her — and — damn it — I can't always stand between her and trouble. I need your help."

Slowly Barney lay down again. Of all things he wanted to hear Bob talk about his sister. Even the mention of her gave him poignant pleasure, mingled with pain.

"Of course there's always some one dangling after her — damn them, but I'll have you to understand I'm not one of them. I dangle after no one."

"I wish you were."

"Oh, hang it, Bob, you know better. If you saw me angling there, you'd be the first one to despise me. When I've made my million, I'll think it over."

"By that time one of the danglers will have got her, and you'll have to talk in the retrospect."

"I had five thousand laid by, after paying father for my education, and now he's gone, that is for my mother, in case anything should happen to me. It's laid by, but it's not mine, you see. There I am. I begin at the beginning, and Peg's at the top. I look up, and she looks down. Hang it — she looks down — and so would you, if I were to follow your advice."

"Oh, man alive, you're all off. You're just as much at the top as she is. She has money, as you say; but you're at the top of your profession, and you're at the top in another way — let me tell you. She likes you. She

treats you better than she does any one else. Besides, you are my friend; do you think that counts for nothing?"

"It counts for your bad taste. She treats me differently — naturally — for she feels safe with me. She would if I were her chauffeur. She knows I'm not in the race."

"Well, all I say is — get in the race. Get in the race. Don't stand by like a boob and see worse men run ahead of you. She's got to marry somebody, and first thing you know she'll be out of your reach."

"She is now. I'm not the man to truckle to any one, even the girl I — love — no not even to her."

"It's not truckling. Money isn't everything."

"If you were suddenly left without a cent, you'd sing a different tune. Inexperience is not a good teacher. Idealism wouldn't feed you, and you'd find philosophy poor diet."

"I tell you what I'd do. I'd go to my friend Barney O'Harrow and ask for a job. There's nothing truckling in asking for a job, is there?"

"And he'd say: 'As you are my friend, I'll give you a job. What can you do?' What would you reply?"

Bob puffed away in silence for a while, then he answered: "I'd say: 'That's up to you. All you have to do is to marry my sister, and I'll do anything you wish. I'll make your fortune for you. I'll —' "

"Hush up. You can always turn the most serious thing into a joke. I'm going to sleep. Good night." Barney turned his face to the wall and shut his eyes tightly.

Then Bob turned his face to the wall in his corner. Gradually the cool, outdoor air drifted in, and although both these friends thought long and earnestly, they at last forgot their dilemmas in sleep.

Barney lay awake the longer. "I love Peg — I love her. Who wouldn't? But I'll never lay myself open to the accusation of wooing her for her fortune. I'd die for her — but there it is. —"

And so the question lay in the hearts of both these two fine fellows. Peg hadn't much to do with it — hadn't anything to do with it. She was the passive one — perhaps.

CHAPTER XV

BARNEY'S SUGGESTION

ELIZABETH GRAVES had learned to drive a mule. She was proud of the fact and considered it her greatest accomplishment. The mule she drove was a steady, gray beast, with a black stripe extending from between his floppy ears to the end of his tail. His fringe of a mane was black also, and so was the tassel on his tail. Contrary to the generally accepted idea of mules, he was a kindly, gentle animal, good-looking and old enough to have certain ways of his own, and a little hard-bitted, withal. Yet Elizabeth understood him; and what is more, he understood Elizabeth and took very good care of her.

When she drove the mule, she sat in a high-topped buggy something like a doctor's gig. It took some effort for the little woman to get into the buggy, for the step was high, and the wheels were large, and the bed was hung on elliptical end springs set well under, lifting the step higher still. Unless the wheel was turned far out when she attempted to mount or alight, she was in danger of wiping it with her neat, black skirt, to the detriment of both the skirt and her temper.

This whole equipment of buggy, harness, and mule belonged to the Deals, who were glad to rent it to the sisters for a fee. The fee was paid in lessons on the cabinet organ and in reading and writing, given to Jenny Deal, a young

woman of eighteen, who helped her mother and did all the outdoor work on their small place, as there was no son to do it.

In order to make the trip to Woodville and back in one day, it was necessary to leave the Settlement at an early hour, so early, now that the days had begun to shorten, that the start must be made before "sun-up."

"Lizzie, have you got the list?" Caroline stood in the doorway, with the gray worsted shawl around her head.

"It's in my bag. You're sure you have everything down?"

"Everything but the automobile and the mowing-machine. All we can't get here."

"Oh, you get along!" retorted Elizabeth, but whether to the mule or her sister, none might know, for though she looked at Caroline, she took up the reins at the same moment. The mule seemed to think she addressed him and started on.

"Get along yourself, and do be careful. The angle you have your bonnet set makes you look like a grenadier."

"I'll be careful, all right. You get in out of the damp air. Good-by."

In went Caroline and off went Elizabeth. One thought was in the mind of each, and over it they both smiled. A letter had come from Peg Kitchel, saying she was in Woodville and was minded to visit them, if Elizabeth could drive in for her. The letter hinted at something other than the visit, which aroused their curiosity and stimulated Elizabeth to touch the mule a little with the whip, and hasten his pace.

"Now, I wonder, —" said Caroline to herself, as she

laid sticks for a fire in the large room preparatory to the morning's school.

The school consisted of four children, one of whom was the red-headed, freckled-faced son of Compton Ross, whose tuition was paid for with a twenty-five-pound sack of flour now and again. Then there was Billy Finch and his little sister, and a pale, slim, little girl who had no mother and who lived about, now with one neighbor and now with another. Just now she lived with the Hutchins. The mountain people had a kindly way of looking after their orphaned little ones, by boarding them around among themselves. The sisters did their part by teaching the child.

"Now, I wonder, —" said Caroline again, stooping before the great fireplace and carefully laying the sticks of fat pine across each other, for she took pride in her ability to make a fire. It was an art, she said, and it was one of the simple household arts she loved. "I wonder, —" but she got no further, for the children came in, and she touched a match to the fat pine, and the flames leaped up the chimney, and school opened.

Four meager little children gazed solemnly up in her face while she read a few verses from the Bible; then they closed their eyes very tightly and repeated the Lord's prayer in concert, as she had taught them. Then she made a little prayer of her own, very short and simple and quaint. Then she called them to stand beside the cabinet organ while she played and sang, patiently teaching them the words line by line.

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child.
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee."

Over and over they repeated the words with her in concert, and then they sang, but no one had any idea of tune. They only repeated the words a little louder each time. However they would begin to get it after a while, Caroline comforted herself. Gathering courage at last, the piping voice of Letty Finch came out with the first line as she understood it: "Gentle Jesus, weak an' wil'," and so for a long time the little ones sang uncorrected, while Caroline was intent on getting the tune into their heads.

Caroline took the same interest in the development of these four children that she would have taken had she had four hundred from the first families in the land. When the morning's session was ended, and she stood alone in the great room, a delicate pink was in her cheek, as if she had passed a really exciting morning; but she could not allow herself to be weary, for there was still much to do. There was no servant in the house, not even a little girl to help wash dishes and sweep up.

The sisters were economical to the last degree. They must be, if they would not beg or starve. But they were hopeful. Of course, help would be sent them — and then — there was Peg.

The afternoon was half spent when Barney O'Harrow rode up to the door. Caroline opened it and stood before him with flour on her hands and a large gingham apron covering her gray cloth skirt.

"Why, come right in. I'm glad to see you."

"Are you really? I thought I'd ride over — was in this vicinity — a little job needed looking after —"

"Just leave your horse at the Deals. Wait, I'll call Jennie. Their stable's empty, for Elizabeth has the mule.

I'm so sorry; she drove down to Woodville to —" Caroline started to cross over to her neighbor's, but Barney stopped her.

"No, no. I'll find her. Here she comes."

Ever on the lookout, Jennie appeared in the Deals' doorway and directed Barney to the shed where he might stable his horse, — for a fee. The instinct of the Deals for turning an honest penny was the talk of the Settlement; but after all it was a help to the sisters, who needed their assistance and would never have asked for it without paying the price.

Barney spent a happy afternoon in that kitchen with Caroline. He seemed in no haste to depart. Was he waiting for some one? He did not say. She finished her batch of cookies, and he kept the stove filled with wood for their baking. She said Peg was expected to arrive with Elizabeth, but he made no comment thereon. At five o'clock Caroline laid a cloth on the end of the kitchen table, and they had tea together. It was pleasant and cosy, and he liked it. While he chatted, he was somewhat distraught, trying to frame up a reason for lingering a day or two at the Settlement. He really had no reason, but one might be managed. Caroline gave him one, and he blessed her, but she did not know it.

"I've been wanting to ask some one," she said; "what is a 'Singin'?'"

"Oh, an 'all day singin'?' Yes, I've been to them. Is there to be one? Not this time of the year, I should think."

"I don't know. I only wanted to learn if there is anything interesting to take Peg to while she is with us.

Jennie is always talking about a 'Singing.' She's wild to learn to play the cabinet organ, so she can play for one. She brought over one of those old-time books in which the notes are all shaped to indicate the different *sol, fa* tones. Here it is. My grandfather used to have one. He used to say people would never sing independently of an instrument until they went back to the old way of note reading. It seems they do that here."

Barney took the book and looked it over with interest, but his real interest was in helping Caroline think out a scheme for keeping Peg with them awhile.

"I don't think they have these Singings at this time of the year. They usually come in May, or at a 'laying-by' time."

"A 'laying-by' time?"

"That's what they call it. The mountain people, with all their isolation, have their regular times and seasons for doing things. I don't know how it is. Nature sets them the example, I suppose. There is a time to plow their pockets of land, and a time to plant and then to cultivate, and then comes a 'laying-by' time. That is when they take a day for a Singin'. Now here, now there, they go, wherever there is a little church that has invited them. I don't know their rule for setting the day or the week, but every one seems to get word of it, and the wagons and buggies and riders from all over the hills will be seen making toward the spot."

"I suppose they make a sort of festival of it and picnic?"

"Oh, yes. Every young man who has a girl gets hold of a top buggy somewhere, if he does not own one, and a mule or a horse, and takes his young woman to the singing.

Every one goes, for miles on every side. You see families with their buggies and wagons piled full of children, and old folks who talk of singings past, and lovers galore, 'Sweetheartin',' and wholly intent on each other; oh, it's fun to watch them."

"And will they let any one come?"

"Indeed, yes. All are made welcome with the kindest courtesy, and are invited to sing and sit up in front, but the sweethearts are likely to sit back by the door and quietly slip outside and wander about, or climb back in their buggies and sit side by side, solemnly decorous or slyly joking. They seem to have no objection to being known as sweethearts, but after they are known as such, woe be to any man who steps between them. Such a breach is rarely, if ever, healed. Often it leads to a lifelong enmity or even a shooting."

"Well, we must take Peg to a Singin'."

"We can't." Barney took covert pleasure in repeating the pronoun "we." "They are all over for this year. Spring is the Singing time."

"What a pity; but that's natural, too. Is it religious? Of course! I might know from their books."

"Always." Then Barney laughed. "It's their drama, religion is. Praying, preaching, singing, resisting the law, stilling, fighting, swearing, marrying, love-making, — most of all love-making, — and dying, are their ecstatic times."

Caroline smiled. "Well, it's so the world over. We are all kinsfolk. I guess it has been so through the ages, and we don't get away from those things by coming to the hills. But what can we do to entertain Peg?"

"Try some other form of drama."

"How?"

"Try a preaching. You'll find a little of every sort there."

"I wish we could. I haven't been to church since we came, and I feel like a heathen."

"You'll feel more like one, after you've been." Barney's eyes danced. "I'll see what I can do. Possibly I can help out. Are they coming back to-night?"

"Oh, yes. I'm expecting them every minute. I declare! It's six o'clock. What can be keeping them?"

"I'll step out and see if they're in sight. Anything I can do for you first?"

"Why, if you would just — mend the fire a bit —" Caroline began to prepare the supper. That was better than worrying. Her remedy for all anxieties was "do something." It was a good remedy.

Barney O'Harrow brought in wood and then took himself off to a point where he could look down the long ribbon of red velvet toward the low country. He returned and put his head in at the door.

"I see nothing of them. They must have been late in starting. Don't you worry. I'll ride down toward Woodville and meet them."

She stood in the doorway with an anxious face as he rode past and waved his hand to her. "I'll bring them, all right. Never you fear," he called, as he loped away.

CHAPTER XVI

PEG DECIDES FOR HERSELF

For an hour or more Caroline waited. The kitchen was savory with the odor of chicken stew, and the dough for the dumplings lay on the bread board ready to be dropped into the kettle the moment the belated ones arrived. The fire in the big room had long since gone out, but sticks were laid for rekindling in Caroline's most careful manner, and all the school litter was tucked under the kindling, ready for the lighted match.

She sat by the kitchen range, tense and listening, and blamed herself for not having given Barney a lantern when he left. What could they do in the dark? Dear, dear! She put the gray shawl around her head and went to the door again and again. It was a fair night, starlit and clear and cool, too cool for comfort unless one were moving, but the air was sweet and fresh and what the sisters would call "crisp."

"Now, Caroline Tabor," she said to herself, "there's nothing to be gained by growing anxious. Just you be ready for emergencies and trust in the Lord." So she put more wood in the kitchen range, moved back the stew, so it should not be "all cooked to death," and filled the tea-kettle with fresh water, devoutly thanking the Lord, as she poured out the contents and filled it again, that water was a free gift and cost nothing, so they could afford to throw it away thus.

While in the midst of these activities she heard a far-off humming and hastened to the door to listen. Away in the distance she saw the sweeping rays of a search-light swinging along in the darkness, causing wayside objects to leap into sight and as quickly disappear, — now a group of pines, and then a bank of red clay, and again a glow of flaming sumac or black gum against a background of densest blackness.

She lingered in the doorway and watched those weird, live lights steadily — like some fatalistic, fascinating spark from another world, climbing, searching, revealing, and passing by, until suddenly they were turned full upon her in a blinding radiance, and Peg's laugh rang out, clear as the note of a Carolina wren on a dark day — a sound piercing through her forebodings as the search-light pierces the dark.

"You don't know what a picture you made, standing there in the door. It was like a magic-lantern slide. Whew! But it has been fine — like — a — a poet's dream. Come on, Bob — chicken stew and dumplings. I smell them."

"She smells dumplings!" criticized Bob.

All talked at once. "She sees them," said Elizabeth. "Were you worried, Carrie?"

"I might have been, if you'd delayed much longer."

"There! I said she'd have sense."

"Where's Mr. O'Harrow?"

"He's on the road, leading the mule; the buggy's half-way down."

"Will he be here soon, think? Had I better drop in the dumplings now? What was the matter, anyway?"

They grouped themselves around the range, all talking

at once, and Elizabeth removed her bonnet and took a hand at the cooking, dropping the dumplings herself, while Peg and Bob replied to Caroline's questions, and gave further enlightenment in a duet. While they talked, Barney entered and joined in the chorus, helping the sisters by lighting the fire in the big room, and bringing in the supper to the school table between the settles.

There, still in duet and chorus, everything was explained and commented on. "You see, the harness began dropping to pieces and kept on dropping to pieces all the way up. We were crawling along as happy as you please, when the tug broke, and Jim just stood still and wagged one ear back at Aunt Elizabeth; and she sat there and laughed and said: 'Look at his ears! Now, isn't he intelligent?' and I jumped out, and we were on a slanting part of the road —"

"As if every part of the road weren't slanting!"

"Keep still, Bob. And then I held the wheel from dragging back so, for Jim kept stepping back all the time, and Aunt Elizabeth climbed out as unconcerned as you please; and there we were, working to get the other tug unhitched, when along came a team of mules, and the young man locked his wheel and came over to us, just sauntering along, and said: 'Kin I he'p ye?' He just went behind that buggy and gave it a push that almost sent it over on to old Jim's back, and blocked the wheel with a stone; then he cut a new buttonhole in the tug, and of course he had to do the same with the other tug to make them the same length. I wish you could have seen him. I had a good chance to watch him. He was handsome, — my goodness, — wasn't he, Aunt Elizabeth? And he was just as quiet and shy

all the time he was fixing things; he only looked right at me once, and that was when I was going to give him something for it, and my hand was in my bag; but I stopped right there, and we only said thank you. I would as soon have thought of paying a prince for picking up my handkerchief, and the prince would have been much more likely to have accepted it."

"She's on to the princes, all right," said Bob.

Barney laughed eloquently.

"Go on, dear. Now don't interrupt any more," said Caroline.

"It was just one adventure, like an old romance all the way, until Bob came along with the machine. If that young man could be dressed like an esquire he would have looked the part, wouldn't he, Aunt Elizabeth? He kept his hat off all the time, — threw it on the ground behind him, — and his hair was long and fell over his face as he bent forward, and his hands were so supple, and his whole body so slender. And his profile was like that old Raphael head of a young man — you know which one, Bob."

"No, I don't. How could I? I'm not a girl, and I never saw the boy."

"Well, never mind, anyway, It was. And his voice was as soft and gentle as if — as if — he had always used it to sing babies to sleep. Really, the only thing he said was: 'Thar, I reckon hit'll hol' now, ef ye're right keerfull,' as he climbed under the hood of his wagon and let up the brake, and then just sighed half aloud to his mules and started on."

"She's making a romance out of Dave Turpin," cried Barney. "What did he have in his wagon?"

"I don't know. Some bags and cornstalks and a pumpkin, and a lot of things. There was a splint-bottom chair — a new one. I'd like to have bought it, only I didn't know what to do with it."

"And if you could have felt about under those cornstalks, you would have found some jugs of mountain moonshine. You remember that time you were with me, Bob, when we were putting the road through, how he came along and camped one night near by, and before morning the men were all roaring drunk, and he was gone, and there wouldn't one of them admit that he brought it to them?"

"Do I? You'd have thought that young scoundrel was as innocent as a babe."

"Well, he was, according to his lights," said Caroline. "I have learned how it is with them. They think they have a right to make it and sell it. They can't see it any other way. Even the women think the same. What they need is education."

"And then, after the esquire came the knight. He was not 'panoplied in armor bright', but he might have been. He was a lot more fascinating than the other. He had a lot of *savoir faire*, as if he had been brought up at court. We were driving along, and old Jim was pulling steady and good, when things gave way again, and this time in a worse place. The other tug broke right at the buckle near his shoulder, and he began to back again, slowly, a step at a time, so Aunt Elizabeth said we might just as well unhitch and sit in the buggy and eat our lunch. I tell you she is a woman of expedients."

"And wasn't it just as well? We fed the mule."

"Yes, and the knight came. He smiled and removed

his hat and gently inquired after our health and set to work at the harness, and said wise things all the time. He rode a nice, sleek, black mule, who kept calling to him, and he would reply. He knew who the rig belonged to, and how long they had had it, and who Aunt Elizabeth was, and asked about the school, and smiled as he did so, as if the school were amusing him, in a quiet way that no one could resent, for his voice was so kind and his smile so to himself. I've been thinking about him ever since. He must have had an interesting life, and he didn't look very old, just old enough to be perfectly delightful."

"About how old might that be, do you think?" asked Barney, turning to Caroline.

"Older than you are," said Peg. "Some arrive sooner than others. This man had evidently arrived early."

"I think almost any age brings it," said Caroline, with a quiet smile. "I've seen it come very suddenly — to some men."

Barney looked down at his plate, and Bob kicked at him under the table.

"This man has a very nice way of keeping in practice. He has been doing quiet little favors since we first knew him," said Caroline. "The first time he came ostensibly to sell us some harvest apples, and inquired very closely into our affairs in such a casual way we did not realize we were being interviewed until he was gone, when we found he had inadvertently given us double measure for our money."

"He brought peaches next time," chimed in Elizabeth. "We reminded him we had only paid for half those apples, and he laughed his little inward laugh, as if the joke were on us, but what he said was that 'ef a man hedn't sense 'nuff

to look afteh what wuz comin' to him, he reckoned he'd haf to go without.' He said the peaches were the 'Ol' Indian peach, as uset to grow wil' on these 'er mountains, an' they wa'n't no mo' these days, cept'n' his.' He said the peck he brought 'mount make a right smart o' sass, er peach butter,' and while I stepped back to get my purse, he calmly rode away without the money. I asked the widow Basle about him, and all I could get from her was that 'Dan'l M'Cune was right quare.'"

"He cut up his halter strap to bind the tug," said Peg, "and when I said I was sorry, he laughed and said he didn't mind 'he'pin' the Deals a leetle, they were thet pore' at they hed to wrastle fer ev'y cent comin' to 'em. He reckoned ef they hedn't 'a' be'n so dum pore, mebby they mount 'a' gin us a harness as 'ud hol' together ontwel we c'd git home 'thout layin' us liable to git kilt fust.' He said: 'He reckoned the mule must take a'ter ol' man Deal, er he'd 'a' hed thet 'er ol' harness tore up ten y'ar ago, 'thout wait'n' fer hit to jes' natchly drap off'n him.'"

"I venture to say he was on his way to see Uncle Dick," said Bob. "He owns a little gold mine, and he must have quite a bit of money laid by."

"Never mention that fact here. His neighbors know nothing of that mine. It is as hidden from them as their stills are hid from us," said Barney. "They're running him for the Legislature. The mountain people want him, because they think he's on their side — as he virtually is, and will help them escape the law; and the low-country folks want him, because they think he can carry the ticket, by having the vote of the hills."

"He's a wise old fox and a philosopher," said Bob.

"I think he's a dear."

"No doubt he thinks you are, if you talked with him much," said Barney.

"Well, I did. I talked with him all I could."

"What's that noise?" asked Caroline, rising suddenly. "I heard something a moment ago, but thought it was a dog howling."

Bob opened the school-room door and looked out into the night, seeing nothing, when the cold nose of a dog was thrust into his palm with a low, pitiful whine.

"Why, what is it, doggie? Poor fellow," said Peg, following her brother. "He wants something, Bob. Go out and see what it is."

The animal leaped up and caught at Bob's sleeve, then ran away and returned, whining and begging. Bob followed, and Peg ran to the kitchen for a lantern. Only a few steps from the door the dog stopped, and standing beside a dark heap, dimly to be descried in the darkness, lifted his head and howled dismally. Peg, bringing the light, saw her brother kneeling beside him, examining the bundle and trying to lift a girl's head.

"It's the girl we saw on the mountain that day," cried Peg.

"You take her bundle, Barney, I'll carry her in. I have her now." Bob lifted her in his arms and bore her carefully. "She's fainted dead away," he said, as he looked in her face, while Peg held the light for him. "Why, good heavens! It is Sally Cloud."

"She has brought her little brother along. He seems to be asleep. Can you hold him, Peg, while I help Bob?" said Barney.

"I don't need any help. You keep the boy," said Bob, and walked on into the schoolroom. "She's nothing to hold." He stood looking at the girl's strangely classic face, as she lay, her head thrown back, over his arm. For a moment he thought her dead and trembled as he held her, but then he felt her breath faintly on his cheek.

"She's living! Poor little heart! She's living."

"Bring her into my room — here," said Elizabeth. "Caroline has the boy. He's been drugged, or something."

They followed Elizabeth back into the house, and Bob gently laid the girl on her white bed, and Peg began to unlace her sodden shoes.

"She's been tramping right through water and everything," said Peg. "Something awful must have happened."

Caroline brought the bottle of salts and hurried back to the baby. "I don't know which needs attention most," she said.

"You look after the boy, and we'll see to her. Get some hot water to her feet, Peg, quick." Bob stood chafing her hands. "Get a glass of water, Peg. Hurry." He knelt beside the bed and bathed the girl's forehead, dipping a corner of his handkerchief into the glass.

Barney bent over her. "A little brandy would help," he said.

"I haven't any. For heaven's sake, get some! Hasn't any one a little brandy?" The girl's eyelids quivered.

"Yes, she needs stimulant," said Caroline, bringing a glass and dropping a little between her lips, while Bob stood back and watched her.

"She'll come around all right now," said Barney, and went away to help Peg heat the water.

Slowly the girl's eyelids lifted, and she stared wonderingly around. The red came back into her quivering lips, a scarlet streak across her pallid face.

"Whar be he? Whar be Honey-Son. Oh, Gawd, ef he be dade, I'll kill 'er. Whar — whar —"

"He's right here, dear. We're taking care of him," said Caroline. "What was the trouble; what happened to him?"

"She gin hit to 'im. I tol' 'er she'd pizen 'im, but she gin hit to 'im, jes' the same. He be'n sleepin', — all day he be'n sleepin', — an' I couldn' wake 'im up, an' I was skeered he were dyin', an' I be'n runnin' down the mountain fer to git ol' Miz Basle to he'p me, but I fell 'er somep'n. Gawd, ef he die, I'll kill 'er."

She tried to rise, and discovered how her feet had been wrapped in hot cloths. "Whar be my shoes? They hain't nothin' th' matteh weth me. Gin me my shoes. I got to git to 'im."

"He'll be all right, Sally," said Bob, bending over her.

Finding herself too weak to rise, she relaxed on the pillow and looked pitifully up, her glowing eyes fixed on Bob's with pathetic appeal. The words which passed her trembling lips seemed more like a prayer than profanity. "Gawd Amighty, I cain' git up, an' him a-dyin'. Cain't ye gin me somethin' to he'p me up, so I kin go to 'im? Be you a doctor? She'll burn in hell to the end o' all time fer this she hev did to 'im, ef he die. Oh, Gawd, he'p me up."

Peg thrilled with horror as she listened to her, but Bob put his arm gently under her head and raised her to a sitting posture, and held the stimulant to her lips. She turned her head away, but he insisted.

"Take it, Sally. Swallow a little. I'll take you in where your little brother is, if you will."

She took the glass from him with shaking hand and drank it all, then turned and clasped her arms tightly about his neck. So he lifted her and carried her into the other room, where they were working over the child. Caroline held the little fellow in her arms, and Barney stood over the stove, pouring strong coffee into a cup.

"If we can only get a few drops of this down his throat," he was saying.

Bob placed his burden in the large rocker and stood by her, talking gently to her, comforting words. "Let them manage, Sally. They know what to do. Lean back and wait. You can help more when he wakes. He'll need you then."

"Will — will — he be a eejit? Miz Basle say ef ye gin chilen sich es that, hit'll make 'em a eejit."

"Don't you worry about that. One dose won't do it. You're a brave girl. You did all you could. You did just the right thing. They'll have him awake in a minute."

"He sleepin' yit. He be."

"Well, wait a little."

"Take him out of doors," said Barney, snatching the child in his arms and carrying him out in the cool night air. The others followed him, leaving Lury and Bob in the kitchen.

"Oh, Gawd Amighty! I cain't wait! He may be a-dyin' now. He lay that still, an' I couldn't heah 'im breathe, an' I thought he were plumb dyin' when I started down the mountain; an' I hed to run like mad dawgs were a'ter me. I didn' know nothin' else to do 'cept'n' jes' to run like hell. Hu-come I heah, any-how?"

"Your dog told us. He came whining at the door, and we followed him to you."

As he spoke, the mongrel stalked stiffly to her from the open door and laid his head on her knee. She stroked him with trembling hand. "He shore be a good dawg. He knows a heap more'n some humans does, don't ye, Clip?"

"He's waking up a little, Sally Cloud, take heart. He'll be all right soon," cried Peggy from the doorway, and Lury bowed her head over the dog and clasped her arms about him, weeping for joy.

"Pore dumb critter, he be'n tryin' to tell me. He know'd, Clip know'd."

Bob still stood, stroking her hair. He could not bear her tears, and he stooped and gathered her again in his arms and carried her back to the bed, the dog following at his heels. Caroline came and bent over her, as she lay there passive and exhausted.

"She needs attention more than the child now," said Caroline. "I'd give her a glass of hot milk, Lizzie, and then if she could only get to sleep."

"Whar's Honey-Son?"

"Margaret has him. He's out in the air, and she's keeping him awake."

"Won't ye gin 'im to me?"

"It's better to keep him out there. If he comes to you, he'll only snuggle down and go to sleep again, and he must not be allowed to do that yet."

She lifted her eyes to Bob's face, those wonderful, lustrous eyes, and gazed at him steadily, as if he might help her. Then she reached out to him, and taking one of his hands in both her own, she clung to it, while her breath came

tremblingly through her parted lips. He slipped his arm beneath her head and lifted her to take the warm milk Elizabeth brought her. Peg came and leaned over the foot of the bed.

"Your little brother is sitting up on Mr. O'Harrow's knee, and he is going to be all right. He smiled at me. You go to sleep now, and we'll take care of him for you."

Then Lury smiled and lay quiet a moment, still clinging to Bob's hand, then, gazing from one to another of the kindly faces gathered about her, "I reckon you-uns all be heaven angels," she said, and quickly dropped off into exhausted sleep.

Peg turned away and walked resolutely through the house and into the now deserted schoolroom. In front of the fireplace, where a few coals still smoldered, she sat down with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. There, after a time, Barney found her.

"How many pennies must I give for your thoughts?" he said.

"You may have them all for nothing. I've come to a decision. Now I know what to do with my life and my money. Nobody need ever try to persuade me out of it, either." She rose and stood before him with a determined lift of her chin.

"No one would be foolhardy enough to try to do that, Peg." He held the heavy-eyed child in his arms, trying to keep the little fellow from sinking into the dull stupor again. "Look at the pretty lady, son. Look!" he said. Barney showed to advantage in Peg's eyes just then. "I wouldn't even dare to ask you what you have determined, let alone trying to dissuade you."

"Well, I may tell you some time, but I'm going to do it, anyway."

It was long past two in the morning before they dared allow the child to sleep, and were themselves settled for the night. Then all slept but Barney O'Harrow, who lay until dawn pondering fruitlessly over Peg Kitchel's words. What had she decided to do with her life and her money? She might give away her money for all of him — but what, ah, what would she do with her life?

CHAPTER XVII

A DECISIVE BLOW

THE next morning the sisters and their guests, gathered at the breakfast table, were deep in consultation over the events of the night before. Lury still slept in Elizabeth's bedroom, and Honey-Son who knew only an open fire in a fireplace trotted contentedly about the kitchen, hovering around the range, curiously feeling the heat from it, and silently investigating the strange things he found in his new environment.

Breakfast was set out in the large room, and Jennie Deal had come over to help with the morning's work. She sat in the kitchen, watching over the little one and drawing her own conclusions about everything.

Barney O'Harrow held in his hand the bottle of "Sleepin' Medicine" Elizabeth had bought out of curiosity so long ago. He shook it, pulled out the cork and touched it to his tongue, and smelled of the contents, then read the label: "'Goodman's Cordial. A Purely Vegetable Compound, Containing no Deleterious Mineral Substance, Soothing to the Nerves, and quieting to Delicate and Irritable Children, Peculiarly Beneficial in Cases of Teething Infants. Delightful to the Taste and perfectly Harmless. Good for Youth and Old Age. Three to ten drops, according to age of patient.' There's enough opiate in this to kill half a dozen men."

"They all use it here. I saw a bottle of it half empty standing on the shelf beside the clock in the Hutchins' home, and I don't suppose we can do a thing about it."

"Lizzie is falling into the way of the people here. She seems to think she must submit to the inevitable without a murmur. I say why submit before we know if a thing is inevitable. Sometimes it isn't. Compton Ross has no more idea what is in all those bottles of patent medicines he sells than that poor dog does lying there beside Sally Cloud's bed."

"No, the blame lies back of Ross."

"Well!" cried Peg. "Don't the people who make it know what's in it? What's the use of all the laws about such things if nobody follows them up and finds out about such drugs?"

"Laws without public sentiment back of them are worthless, and worse than worthless," said Bob sagely.

"But you have to have laws, Bob. How can you get public sentiment back of anything that doesn't exist?"

"Get your public sentiment right, and evils will go out of themselves without any laws."

Peg looked down in her cup with a puzzled expression and stirred her coffee, a little frown between her brows. Then she looked up, and her eyes met Barney's squarely and caught the twinkle in them.

"Well, something ought to be done, anyway. Talking and speculating about things never accomplishes anything unless some one cares enough to act. Give it to me, Barney."

"But what will you do about it, child?" said Caroline.

"You blamed Aunt Elizabeth for submitting to the inevi-

table. I'm just not going to submit." Barney passed the bottle over to her and she took it gingerly, as if the mere touch of it was deadly.

"The outside of it is harmless, Peg," Bob laughed.

"Hush, Bob. You always say wise things and then turn them all off with a joke. It's just as worthless to know what ought to be and then only joke about it and do nothing, as it is to make laws and never obey them. Isn't it, Barney? Isn't it, Aunt Elizabeth?" She placed the bottle beside her plate and removed her buttered toast from its proximity. Bob laughed outright.

"I wouldn't eat that toast, if I were you. You should have washed your hands after touching the bottle, before you took up your toast. Here, have another piece."

"How ought one to go about this, Barney?" Peg ignored her brother entirely.

"Give the bottle back to me, and I'll take charge of it," said Barney, and Peg felt herself set one side. She handed it back with a slight grimace.

"Maybe sometime you'll think it worth while to answer my question," she said quietly.

Barney sprang to his feet, and the rest rose from the table with him. Peg had scored one against him, and he must retrieve himself. He followed her with a look of contrition as she passed out, but she was oblivious.

"Aunt Elizabeth, I made a decision last night, if — if — you'll let me."

"I let you, child! Why, I have no way of hindering you in anything, and no desire to, dear." The way Aunt Elizabeth said "dear" to Peg was delightful. Barney echoed the word in his heart, and in the look he cast after the two as

they walked away together. Then he took himself off on the hillside and sat with his head in his hands and the bottle of Goodman's Cordial buttoned in his pocket.

It was Saturday, and there was no school, so Peg and Elizabeth walked over to the large table and sat down side by side in the school chairs, and talked, earnestly and quietly. For a long hour and then another they talked, Peg eagerly and rapidly at last, and Elizabeth with shining eyes and flushed cheeks.

Jennie Deal finished the morning's work with Caroline, and then took little Honey-Son home to entertain him where he would not waken his sister, who was still taking the sweet restorative of nature and sleeping off her exhaustion with the ease of youth and perfect health. Bob strolled aimlessly about for a while, wondering what had become of his friend, and what Peg was up to now, and when Sally Cloud would appear, and finally took himself off to his car and sat there in the soft autumn air, reading a volume of *Les Misérables* in the French, which he had found among the books on the sisters' new pine book-shelves.

Early that Saturday morning, Dave Turpin came sauntering into the house at the Cove, wishing to have his breakfast. "Whar's Lury?" he asked. "Hain't ye got nothin' fer me to eat? I got to start weth a load, an' I'd ought to be half-way to Plainsville by now. Here I be'n workin' sence 'fore sun-up, an' here you be jest crawlin' out o' bed."

Ellen slowly moved about the disordered room and paid no heed to Dave's questions. She took a great knife and began to cut thick slices from a side of white, salt pork, laying them in an unwashed skillet, which she thrust in the

fireplace among the coals. She handed Dave a huge iron teakettle which stood on the hearth.

"Whyn't you he'p a leetle, when you see I be mos' dade weth Buddy keepin' me awake half th' night? Fill this weth wateh fer th' coffee. I neveh see nothin' like the way them chil'en be'n actin'. I hain't slep' a wink ontwel I hearn the rooster crowin', Lury so crazy 'bouts her baby; 'neveh see how she spoilin' 'im, wakin' 'im up an' runnin' off in th' night when he'd oughteh be sleepin'."

Dave took the kettle obediently and ran down to the spring, without waiting to hear what she was saying, and returned before she was through. He hung the kettle on the crane over the fire, and seizing a long fork, began turning the pork in the skillet, while Ellen talked on as she beat up a batter of corn-meal and buttermilk and poured it in another unwashed pan, greasy from former bakings and a residue of pork gravy.

"Runnin' out in th' night weth her leetle brotheh like she do, I done tol' 'er she'd see her maw's ghos' walkin' afteh her, an' I see somep'n white an' long a-trailin' ater 'er as she run, an' I shet the door and kivered my hade weth th' bade clo's, fer I didn' want no sperit walkin' here, weth Jim drunk thar to th' hawg pen, in the shuck shed, — sleepin' thar like he were a hawg hisse'f, an' nobody to he'p me nor stan' by me ef so be hit were a ghos', fer I know Sally Cloud do come heah sperit walkin' an' ha'ntin' 'round like she up to somep'n. I see a white streak come in th' winder one night, right acrost Lury's bade, an' she were in hit; I seed 'er face an' 'er shape in hit like she were thar fer sueh —"

"Aw, you haish. You ain't fit'n to take the name o' Sally Cloud on yore lips. Git thet corn-brade in thar

bakin', cain't ye. Whar's Lury? Ef she were here, I'd 'a' be'n started a' hour ago. Make the coffee an' set out th' 'lasses. I cain't set roun' here hearkin' to ye all day."

Dave shoved back the litter of things on the end of the table where Ellen was standing, set a plate for himself, and took the salt pork out of the skillet. Then he poured molasses into a broken saucer and finding a piece of cold corn-bread left from the day before, he began a comfortless meal, sopping the bread in the molasses and tasting the meat. "Whar's Lury?" he asked again, shoving back his chair and resigning himself to wait for his coffee and hot bread.

"Ef you be so sot on Lury, whyn't ye take keer on 'er yerse'f? I cain't watch out fer ev'ybody an' ev'ythin' weth all to do. Thar's Buddy wakin' up. Now he'll holler an' cry fer a' hour."

But the child did not cry, he only turned heavy-lidded eyes on Dave and half smiled. The young man took the cold corn-bread and molasses over and began feeding it to the child, who ate it languidly. "What ails the leetle un? He don't seem to have no stumick fer victuals. Don't like cold corn-bread no betteh'n the res' on us, do ye, kid?"

Ellen slipped out the door and ran down the path toward the hog pen, where she had seen her husband lying drunk the night before on the corn shucks. She had poured water on the coffee and set the pan of corn-meal batter among the coals to bake, and now, under pretense of bringing in more fuel, she left the place to Dave and the child. She was filled with fear, and her heart pounded in her breast, for she well knew what she had done to Lury's little brother, and when Lury took him and ran out in the night, she did not think she would ever see the child alive again.

She could hear Lury's voice ringing still in her ears as she called back to her: "Ellen Furman, I tol' ye not to gin' 'im thet stuff. Ef he die, I'll tell Dave to git Dan'l M'Cune to hev ye indited fer hit. I will, an' ye'll sure be hung. I'll hev ye tho'd in jail, an' from jail ye'll walk straight into hell fieh. Dave'll know what-all to do to ye."

Yes, Dave. Dave Turpin was the one she knew would leave no stone unturned to have her brought to justice. He alone knew the venom Ellen Furman carried in her heart toward Lury. She had seen his eyes fixed on her face many a time with an understanding smile, when she sat watching Lury and the child together. Her covert remarks to the brothers Furman had not been lost on Dave, and he had told her once that she had better keep her claws in, or he would cut them so close she would have to turn out on the hillside and root with the ground hogs for the rest of her life.

"Dave'll know what-all to do to ye. Dave'll know what-all to do to ye." Lury's last words rung in her ears as she ran. Ellen glanced back toward the house to see if Dave were watching, and stooped as she did so, gathering a few chips and sticks in her dress skirt to cover her reason for being there should she see him looking. No, for once Dave was off his guard. He lay stretched on Ellen's bed, his hands clasped beneath his head, gazing at the smoke-blackened ceiling, and thinking of Lury, and wondering why she had deserted him when she knew he was to start on a trip that morning. She had said she wanted to see him before he left; why had she gone?

Presently Ellen came creeping back into the room, flung her skirt full of fuel on the hearth, and began to lift the

food from the fire. She glanced covertly at Dave and was content to let him lie a minute longer until her stupid, growling husband should come in and find him there. Buddy sat beside Dave, contentedly crumbling up the corn-bread Dave had given him soaked in molasses. His hands were covered with the sticky mess, and his pinched little face smeared with it.

Dave rolled over toward the child and held the little fellow's hands off from his face, laughing. The youth was fond of the children and often played with them. "Look out, kid," he shouted, "don't you gorm me up weth them 'lasses."

As he lay thus, Jim Furman came lumbering up the path among the weeds and stood a moment, looking in. "Git up, Dave, ef ye don't want to be gormed up," said Ellen. "Hit be yer own fault. I done tol' ye a heap o' times not to lay on my bade. Git up an' eat. I be'n wait'n' on ye." Ellen glanced at her husband, and fear filled her heart as she realized the foolishness of her act in waking him at that moment. His face empurpled with rage and drink, a dangerous glitter in his bloodshot eyes, he leaned against the open door, regarding Dave, who was for the moment oblivious of all but himself and the boy.

Too late Ellen tried to assuage him with food. "Set an' eat, Jim. Eat whilst yer corn-brade's hot enough to melt butter." Strangely enough, he turned on his wife first.

"Yas, melt butteh! Butteh wouldn't melt in yore mouth, ef ye hed a piece thar big's my fist." He walked toward her and made a pass at her with his enormous clinched fist, but missed her. Dave rose and caught his arm, and pushed him into a chair at the end of the table.

"Set thar an' take yer coffee. I reckon yer needin' coffee 'bouts now. Here, take mine. Hit's col' 'nough to drink by now, settin' here waitin'. Gin me anotheh cup, Ellen; I won't 'low 'im tech ye. He'll be all right in a bit." Dave sat down opposite him, and Jim sullenly ate, and drank the half-cold coffee, and glowered at the young man.

Ellen moved about, waiting on the two men obsequiously and impartially, furtively eyeing her husband and keeping out of the reach of his arm. She kept up a continuous stream of quavering complaint, however, as if thus to divert him from the consequences of her own act in waking him before he had had time to sleep off his debauch.

"Hit's been awful this night. They shore be ha'nts 'bout, fer I neveh hearn nothin' like them dawgs howlin' an' Lury's baby screach'n' like he hev'n' fits, an' Lury act'n' like mad, runnin' out weth 'im down th' mountain —" As a fact, Lury's little brother had not cried since the morning before, but had slept heavily ever since Ellen had dosed him.

"You haish!" bellowed her husband, making a pass at her with his knife, as she stood pouring Dave's coffee. She screamed and cowered back, and Dave caught his hand.

"What you pesterin' round fer, Ellen. Go yandeh an' set weth yer kid. I'll keep 'im back. Quit, Jim. Yore drunk, an' don't know what ye doin'."

Then Jim Furman sat back as he was commanded, but seemed to be wrestling with some thought to which he was unused. He usually treated his wife well and obeyed her, rather than to have any annoyance from her. He knew it was not her this time he wanted to punish; but how to get

at the matter he had in mind without picking a quarrel with Dave he did not know.

"You'll keep me back f'om 'er, will ye? You won't 'low me tech 'er, won't ye?" The coffee was beginning to clear his brain, and he knew what he would do. His mood changed from a befuddled sense of personal injury to one of hot and wild anger. He rose and stood in the middle of the room, and looked from one to another, at Dave, quietly going on with his disturbed breakfast, and at his wife, cowering with guilty looks on the edge of her bed beside the child, who still sat playing with his sticky hands, opening them and shutting them and licking off the molasses contentedly. The only thought now in Ellen's mind was that of self-protection. She glanced at her husband's face, and then turned her somber, dark eyes on Dave.

It was enough. With a low growl, like that of an enraged beast, Jim turned on the young man; but for all Dave's outward tranquillity, he was alive and watchful. He knew the quality of the man, and with lithe ease he bounded back and lifted the chair in which he sat, holding it between himself and his opponent. He made no attack, but merely held Jim at bay until he could reach the door, when he slipped out and would have gone off to his team, had not a word from Ellen sent her husband bounding after him, with words in his mouth too foul for human ears.

In one instant Dave knew that the time had come when he must settle all accounts and leave that home that was no home, going henceforth his own way. It was one hundred and forty pounds of sinew, muscle, and bone against two hundred of drink-sodden fat, and Dave knew the battle was an uneven one; but blinded with anger, he struck

fiercely, and the big man went down an inert heap before his wife, who came creeping to the door.

Dave looked down upon her, his lips quivering with rage. "Ellen Furman, what were thet word yer done spoke to Jim make him say sich a talk to me, callin' me that as make the air ye breathe stink fitten' to pizen ye? Ye be at th' bottom o' this. Ye be thet pizen clar th'ough a rattler wouldn' dar' bite ye, fer feah o' pizenin' hisse'f."

The hate in Ellen's eyes looked back at him, but she only said: "I cain' guess hu-come he actin' this-a-way. I—"

"Git some wateh an' wash th' blood off'n his face; he'll come to d'rectly." She went and returned with a rag, which she sopped in a tin cup of water, and squatting beside her husband began to mop his bleeding face. She did not look squarely at Dave, and her whole manner was furtive and conciliatory.

"You hadn't ought a' hit 'im like that-a-way when he were drunk, pore feller," she whined.

"Yas, pore feller! You be'n stirrin' up a skunk's nest; I c'n see by th' look o' ye. Stan' up an look me square in th' eye, ef so be ye kin. Stan' up, I say! Now you tell me what-all meanness ye be'n doin' to Lury an' th' kid."

"I tell ye I neveh done a thing. He be'n screachin' an' yellin' fit to drive ye crazy, an' she gin 'im medicine to make 'im sleep, an' when he done got to sleep, she go hollerin' 'at he a-dyin', an' snatch 'im up an run down mountain weth 'im, like I tell ye. She be a rale wil' cat oveh thet chile. I—"

"You be'n dosin' her baby. Ef any harm come to him or her, I'll have th' law on ye, an' ye'll hang fer hit. I'll neveh let up on ye, hear?" With sudden lighting of the

eyes, he rushed into the house, and poking among the ashes in the far corner of the fireplace, drew out a bottle he had spied there when he was turning the pork in the skillet. It was not quite empty. He dusted it off and placed it in his pocket. "I'll ask Lury 'bouts this, see?" he flung back, as he passed without glancing at her again.

Anger now began to get the better of Ellen's fear. Lury's words came back to her from the lips of Dave, and she shrieked after him as he hurried along the path leading to the mule-shed, near which the loaded wagon was standing.

"Yas, git th' law on me, will ye? I'll hev' th' law on you, fer what I knows an' can prove. What'd I tell Jim? Wall, I tol' Jim come 'long in an' see whar you a-lyin' whilst he a-sleepin' in th' hawg shed, an' he come an' see what he see. Hear?"

"She too low-down fer a man what has respec' fer hisse'f to speak back at," he muttered, as he led out his mules and began to "tie up." "I'll go down an' sell this load an' fetch th' money to Lury, an' git her to bide 'long o' widow Basle, an' then I'll quit."

As he drove off down the mountain, he looked back once and saw Jim sitting up, and Ellen standing arms akimbo, with her back toward her husband and her eyes following the wagon. Buddy, a small, blinking mortal, stood in the doorway, screaming, his mouth stretched wide, and his face and hands smeared with molasses. He turned back to his team and whistled softly.

"She shore be a hell cat," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII

IDEALISM

When Lury opened her eyes at last, it was nearly noon, and Peg and Elizabeth had just finished their long talk. They stood beside the bed looking down on her, and Lury looked up first into the warm brown eyes of Peg. She gazed long and steadily; then a faint smile played wanly across her face, answering the twinkle dancing in Peg's eyes.

"He's all right, Sally Cloud; your baby is all right. He's been playing around, and now Jenny Deal has him while you rest."

"I reckon you-uns all be heaven angels. I'll git up now an' git Honey-Son an' go home."

She sat up and looked about her. The night before she had seen nothing of her surroundings. All she remembered was that she had been taken in, and that loving words had been said, and her little brother had been cared for and saved. She awoke keen and alert, and curiously interested in all she heard and saw.

A window was open, and a white muslin curtain was blowing gently back and forth. A black gum tree shook brilliantly red leaves before the window, and a belated cicada shrilled its high, vibrant note. These things Lury heard and saw, and she also heard herself called Sally Cloud again. What should she do? Should she tell the truth? With the same quick decision she had used the day she gave herself that name, she now took it back.

"My name be Lury Bab. You-uns callin' me by my maw's name. I wish to Gawd hit were mine."

"Oh, I thought Bob called you that, — my brother, you know."

"Yas'm. I done tole him I lied to 'im that time. I tol' 'im what fer. I'll git up now an' go to Honey-Son."

"You lie still and we'll have the baby brought to you," said Elizabeth. And then Lury lay back and looked at her hands, and noted that they were clean, and saw that a soft white gown had been put on her, and that her clothing was laid neatly across a chair at the foot of her bed.

She stared at Elizabeth, and her lips trembled, but all she said was: "You-uns shore be right good."

It was all strange and a revelation, like a glimpse into heaven itself, and the words heaven angels, which she had applied to the sisters and Peg, lingered in Lury's mind. At preachings she had heard a little about heaven and the angels, and how they ministered and stood before the throne. What was a throne and what ministering was she did not know, but in a vague way she arrived at the thought of ministering as doing kind deeds, such as were being done to her.

At preachings also she had heard about hell and devils and fire and brimstone, and all the concomitants of punishments and torture — and when she mentioned these things they seemed more real to her than heaven and the angels. The way she consigned Ellen Furman to "hell fieh", in Peg's hearing, caused that young woman's blood to run cold. When Honey-Son was brought to her, she clasped him in her arms and looked him all over, to see if any remains of the deadly sleep still lingered in some mysterious way. It

was then she consigned Ellen to those dire deeps, remarking that she must go home now and "Gin Ellen hell."

Lury had had her breakfast in bed, and Honey-Son sat contented with her arm around him, sweet and clean and beautiful as a little cherub. Peg sat on the edge of the bed and smilingly watched them. It was then Lury spoke of her own hands.

"Somebody done washed my han's, and put this 'er' clean thing on me."

The contrast, of which Peg could have no conception, between this state of things and what Ellen would have done, was vivid in Lury's mind, and drew forth the horrible anathema against Ellen from Lury's beautiful lips, — such words as Peg never believed could come from the lips of any one in earnest, let alone the lips of an innocent-faced girl.

Peg leaned over and took Lury's hand in hers. "Yes, I washed your hands last night, and put my nightgown on you, and you were so tired and sleepy you did not know what I was doing. So now, you won't say those terrible things about — that woman — any more, will you?"

"I don't keer anythin' 'bouts her now, long's Honey-Son be safe, but she hev to hev what's comin' to 'er. I cain't go thar an' 'low her do like she done, and I has to gin 'er —"

"Don't, Sally Cloud. I don't care what your name is; I'm going to call you that, because I like it. But, don't say those terrible swear words any more. Never mind what she does."

"I has to min'. When she do like she do, I has to cuss. They is nothin' else I kin do. Ef I does hit hard 'nough,

she'll quit, fer she be feared o' th' devil, an' 'at's all she do be feared on."

"You shan't ever go back there any more, Sally Cloud. You shall live here and be my little sister. I'll take care of you."

"I has to go back. All is, I got to go back, fer — thar's Dave. He cain' live thar 'thout I be thar. Hit's my place. He has no place to live, an' I has no place to live, 'thout jes' thar."

She sat up now, with a determined set of her red lips, saying: "I has to git up, please, ma'am," and Peg saw that she was courteously dismissed.

"All right, Sally Cloud. We'll talk about that other matter afterward. Shall we?"

"'Bouts what matter, ma'am?"

"About where you will live, you know."

"Yas'm, but I has to live thar." She said this wearily and conclusively, and Peg discreetly departed and talked the question over with the sisters.

Now, Lury, as far as she could understand her duty in life, was right. She would not beg nor live on anybody's bounty, and her only support came from the work of the brothers in the still, — only a small share of which was by any means considered hers, — and from Dave's peddling of the deadly stuff.

Dave had been good to her, and he had loved her mother, and had come back to stand between herself and those who would willingly rob her of all. If she left, Dave would find the place intolerable, and that thought more than any other held her firm. So she went her way, and reluctantly Peg and the sisters saw her depart, leading the little brother by

the hand along the trails and short cuts, climbing toward her wretched home.

"She seems so pitifully grateful, although she hardly said a word of thanks. One just feels it," said Peg.

"There is something I don't know about in all this," said Elizabeth. "I'm going over to talk to the widow Basle. She knows all about every one on these mountains, I do believe. There must be something we could do, if we only knew the way to go about it."

Peg took a solitary walk along a stony path beside a little stream, leading up from the house toward a tempting bit of wooded glade. She did not know where the path led, but it looked interesting, and she found it so indeed. She traced the stream upward to where a clear spring had been hollowed out and arched over with cement, and stooping down, she filled her two hands with the cool water and drank. Then, lifting her head, the clear drops trickling from her chin and the tip of her nose, she looked straight into the dancing eyes of Barney O'Harrow.

"Ah-ha! I've caught you sulking up here," she cried, drying her hands and face on an inadequate handkerchief and climbing up to where he sat. "Isn't this a darling little nook? How did you find it?"

"How did you?" he countered, spreading his coat on the flat rock at his side to make a seat for her.

"I came for a walk, not to sit and —" Nevertheless, she took the seat.

"Sit and — what?"

"Oh, mope, sulk, anything you like that you were doing."

"Why should you think that I was either moping or sulking?"

"How do you come to be here just now? I thought you were going to take that long six months or more of engineering work in Tennessee."

"Sometime you may think it worth while to answer my question," quoted Barney.

"Very well, sir. I saw mope and sulk in your every movement as you left the house after breakfast; and I saw it in your look as I lifted my head from the spring; and I saw it in your walk when you started up this path two hours ago or more, —"

"Did you see me start up this way?" Barney's face lit up with a joyous light, and as he turned to look at her, she thought him positively handsome.

"How could I help seeing you, when this path leads right past the schoolroom window, and Aunt Elizabeth and I sat there, looking straight up at it?"

"Well, you have replied to my question and told me more — enough to shame me out of the sulks, so I'll reply to yours. Why I did not at first I don't know, unless it may be a habit we men have of always thinking we must take the disagreeable things on our own shoulders and not let women be bothered with them. For instance, think what a disagreeable thing it would be for you to get in a row, prosecuting some maker of patent medicine, going to law and all that."

"But why should you always decide for us what we should do, even to save us, — if that is the reason, — from some annoyance? Even granted the best of motives, how would you like us to decide for you men all such questions as you feel yourselves competent to decide for us?"

"I'm not going to get into an argument with you, Miss

Kitchel, on such a ticklish subject. You and your wishes are above all dictation from any one. Here is your bottle."

He reluctantly handed over the object of their dispute, but she did not touch it, only looked laughingly up in his eyes. "You haven't answered my question yet."

"I've forgotten what you asked."

"I said: 'How should one go about this?' And I wanted to know."

"And you thought I would know? Bless your heart! I didn't know, that is, not the best way. I was only fencing for time. I — we — men like to have you think we know it all."

"But let's really talk about it and think what is best to do. I want to fight them — the ones who are to blame for this."

Now Barney was sorely beset. He did not want to talk about the deleterious drugs and how to fight their manufacture. He wanted to talk about personal, intimate things with her, — to touch her, draw her to him, — tell her how he had stolen the time for this one day of idleness just to see her and be flouted and made fun of by her. He did not care to have her practical and philanthropic and so terribly independent.

He was very stupid, poor man. If he had only known, she did not care to be so very independent. But she could not turn about and tell him so. So he sat staring gravely at the bottle, pretending that his only thought was of that.

"Shall I put this back in my pocket until I can find out the best way?" he asked humbly.

"Yes, if you would. It really is good of you to do it for me — Why, what's Bob doing?"

"Starting up the machine, evidently."

"He can't be going! Let's go back."

They returned, but Bob and the machine were already far on up the road, and they went for a mountain climb by themselves, quite content to do so.

As for Bob, while he sat watching Lury and the little brother slowly threading their way along the trail, the thought seized him that he would drive up to the spot where he was sure her path led across the automobile route, and give her a lift to some point nearer her home, so, speeding swiftly along, he arrived at the crossing long before her.

There he sat, reading his book when she appeared, and would have passed him with merely a half smile and a "Howdy", but that he called to her.

"Come," he said, leaping up. "Let me take you and your little brother up a part of the distance."

She looked longingly at the panting machine, and her eyes were eloquent with delight, but she demurred. "I don't reckon I betteh. Honey-Son, he mount be right skeered."

"Oh, no. He won't be afraid, will you, boy. You can sit up in front with me and hold him on your lap. You get in first, and he'll want to go with you, see if he won't."

Bob lifted the child in his arms, and she clambered in, and naturally the little fellow struggled to go to her.

"There, see how he wants to go, now that he sees you are in? Why, he'll think this is the greatest thing in the world, won't you, boy?"

Lury sat beside Bob, elated, palpitating, glad to her heart's core, but so demure that he wondered if she cared

after all for the lift he was giving her. She clung to her little brother, hardly daring to breathe in her excitement.

Bob glanced now and again at the girl, noting the delicate Greek outline of her profile and neck, the forward tip of her head, and the wild knot of curling gold at the top. He decided she must have descended from an ancestry of quality, but after all, the ancestry were past and buried, and Bob murmured, philosophically:

"She's only what she is and what she may be."

She turned as if she thought herself addressed, and the look in her eyes was that of a question.

"What is it, Sally Cloud?" he asked kindly, bending toward her.

She laughed softly and turned her face away. "My name be Lury Bab," she said.

"Oh, yes. I forgot you said Sally Cloud was not your name, but you did not tell me what it really was, so I had to call you that. What were you going to say?"

"I don't reckon."

"Oh, but I am sure you were going to say something. What were you thinking?" She was silent, and he tried again. "Do you like to ride like this?"

"I were think'n wisht I were dade, — on'y fer Honey-Son."

"Why — Sally — Lury Bab! That's no right thing to wish for, — a live girl like you!"

"I reckon you'd a heap rutheh be dade 'n flyin' cl'ar up yon'way th'ough th' blue, 'an you'd be livin' like I be, weth them as I lives weth."

He watched her eyes lift along the climbing road ahead of them to the mountain top and then to the puff of white

cloud sailing through the blue above, and saw where she got her idea.

"Do you think you would be like that cloud up there?"

"Sometimes, in th' night, when I have been dreamin', I have see'd maw that-a-way."

"But you need not live with those people who have been so unkind. You know my sister told you you could live down there and be her little sister — didn't you understand?" He spoke very gently and tenderly. The dear little struggling creature! He even felt guilty at the thought of taking her any nearer to the home from which she had fled. She was silent, and a stubborn setting of her lips caused him to try his powers of persuasion. "You think a great deal of this little brother, don't you?"

"I think's a heap o' him, yas'r." She drew him closer and laid her cheek against his curly head.

"Well, you know if you did as she asked of you, he could go to their school and learn to be a fine, good man, and you would be very proud of him some day."

"I be right proud on him now."

"I know, but then he would learn to read, and be a great man, and —"

"Yas'r, but I reckon I hev to do fer him myse'f and live whar I be." She spoke so conclusively that he was almost vexed at the thought of her stupidity and opposition. He essayed to argue the point with her.

"But why must you live there, Lury? What reason can you give me?"

Her expressive face took on its old, vacant look, and her only response was: "Hit be fer me to do."

"Well," he thought, "it may be a sin to take her back,

but what can I do?" So they sped on in silence for a time. Then she said:

"I reckon I betteh git out heah. Ef I ride on, I'll be goin' too far fer me to walk back, weth Honey-Son, he go that slow."

Instantly Bob slackened speed and stopped. "Why, Sal — Lury Bab! Have you let me take you too far? I'm sorry. Wait until I get where I can turn, and I'll take you back again."

"I don't guess I be too fer. Thank ye." She clambered out, and he sprang down and lifted the boy to her arms. The little fellow was almost asleep. "You mustn't carry him. He's too heavy for you. Let me carry him a little way." But the child twisted and writhed in his arms when he took him from her, and he set the stubborn little feet on the ground. "There, make him walk on his own two feet. That's right."

"He be right skeered o' strangers," she apologized, and the little one wound himself in her thin blue skirt, causing her slender figure with its graceful curves to be plainly revealed. Classically statuesque they were together, and Bob could not help but admire. He regarded them with a poignant sense of pain, as he recalled their pitiful loneliness.

"Nature is so wasteful — so wasteful," he thought, looking helplessly back at her.

As she stood thus, her eyes were wistful, and her red lips curved in a half smile. She seemed to realize that she had not made herself understood, and that he would not know she was grateful, so she spoke again hesitantly.

"You-uns all be right good. Thank ye."

"That's all right, Sally Cloud; I'm sorry you won't stay down below." And he leaped down to his machine and sent it spinning on rapidly, thinking as rapidly and as wildly. "Oh, I'm an idealist and a fool — I guess."

She swung a small bundle by the string and comforted Honey-Son, as she walked away, searching for the trail leading to her home. There was food in the bundle with which Elizabeth had supplied her, and soon beside a little waterfall, a tiny thread of a stream that trickled over a high boulder, she seated herself and began to eat her lunch and feed her little brother.

CHAPTER XIX

DAVE AND LURY

"Lury, hu-come you here? Seem like you runnin' away f'om me right spry these days."

"Oh, Dave, I be so glad you here, I be like to cry. Yas, I run. I run like th' mountain was afire and like to ketch me an' Honey-Son. Hu-come you oveh this-a-way?"

The anxious look faded from Lury's face as she watched Dave Turpin saunter toward them. He sat down on the other side of the boy, but he reached his arm across to include them both in its curve, as he stretched himself on the ferny bank where they sat.

"I done a right smart o' travelin' this mawnin'. I be'n oveh to ol' man Arl'nton's 'n' cl'ar back here goin' on to'ds Plainsville, an' I 'lowed to gin th' mules a restin' spell, an' set here an' eat. I be carryin' a heavy load this trip, an' hit be th' last load I'll carry fer th' Cove's long's I be livin'."

"Oh, Dave, what fer? Ef I hed a' knowed thet, I mount 'a stayed thar."

Dave's face expressed dismay. Had Ellen poisoned Lury's mind against him? "Stayed whar, d'ye mean? Did ye run 'way f'om th' Cove 'count o' me bein' thar? See here, Lury, what-all hev Ellen Furman be'n tellin' ye? She be th' low-downest hell cat eveh clawed 'er way 'long a hillside, er out'n a hole. Lury, tell me. Tell me." He took hold of her elbow and drew her toward him till her head

rested on his shoulder and Honey-Son's curly head was pushed down on his lap, where he soon fell asleep. "I hain't neveh done no meanness to ye, Lury," he pled. "Hu-come you run off, when you know'd I were leavin' with a load this mawnin'? Hev Ellen be'n th'owin' dirt on me, makin' out I were — were — up to devilment tow'ds ye?"

He spoke gently, and Lury found comfort in the hollow of his arm. She drew a long breath and nestled closer. "Dave, ef Ellen did sich es that, makin' out you up to meanness, I — I'd git Jim's gun an' kill 'er. You think I'd listen to words 'gin you, Dave? She mount holler words gin you, Dave, so loud they'd hear her screach cl'ar down to Woodville, an' I'd neveh hear 'er."

"Thar, Lury. I knowed ye wouldn'. Tell Dave what she done?"

"I has a heap to tell. You tell me first what fer you goin' to quit."

But Dave chose to be silent over his grievance until he had heard Lury's story. Then she told him where she had been and why she would not stay in the Settlement with the good school-teachers.

"I reckon Ellen means we-uns to cl'ar out an' leave the hull darn Cove fer them to do weth an' make off'n fer th'rselves," he said at last. "Bes' thing we c'n do'll be to leave 'em be thar 'til th' rev'nues ketches 'em, — fer they cain't sell nothin', not secret like. They hain't be'n a raid fer quite a spell, an' hit's 'bout time fer one — When th' officers comes an' cl'ars 'em out, we'll go back thar an' hev things fine. You'n me'll git married, Lury; how about it?"

"Oh, Dave! Ye reckon so? Dave, do ye think a heap on me?" She lifted bright, wistful eyes to his.

Dave laughed a merry laugh and threw back his head with the joy of it, just as a bird will lift its head and throw out its happy breast to sing more loudly to its mate. Lury laughed too, with the contagion of his joy, but she was a bit discomfited. Why should he laugh at her question?

"Quit laughin', Dave. I'll neveh marry nobody 'thout he do think a heap on me. What fer'd I do sich es that?"

Then Dave burst out again, with fresh happiness. He had not dreamed, when he rode away from the Cove with Ellen's foul words in his ears that morning, that he could be thinking such sweet and happy thoughts before night. But Lury had suffered too much during the last twenty-four hours, and her heart still ached, and she feared the future. There was still much to be said, and with nothing to live on, and little Honey-Son to keep, what could she do, and how could they live until the officers had cleared the Cove for them — even if they should make a raid. She was silent and her eyes filled with tears.

"Thar, Lury, don't," said Dave tenderly. "I hed to laugh 'er bust, I be that happy. Hain't you neveh thought on how you'n' me, we'd git married some day? Why, Lury, I hev thought on hit eve'y day an' eve'y hour o' all the days, and drempt on hit all the nights, an' I jes' be'n waitin' fer you to grow up, an' now, all to wonst, I see here you be grow'd."

"But what'll we live on, Dave, ef you quit — an' th' hain't nothin' fer ye to do but quit, th' way she hev acted — an' — Dave, I hev to keer fer Honey-Son."

"You think I'd leave you keer fer him all by yorese'f,

Lury? Why, I'll keer fer him." He laid his hand on the pile of golden curls in his lap, that covered the sleepy head. "They's a heap I c'n do fer 'im. We'll do fer 'im an' school 'im, an' — an' — he'll be a heap betteh done by 'an eveh you an' me has been, hear?"

She had drawn away from him when he laughed, but now she nestled again in his arm, happily silent. Where Dave had learned the art, who may know, but certain it is he was artistic in his love-making. Deep down in his soul he loved Lury. She was his all, and for her only, since Sally Cloud's death, he had lived, hardly thinking of marriage, until of late when she had become so womanly over her little brother. It had matured her and lifted her out of the sloth and disorder of the home where Ellen presided; and she had grown tall and looked older for the added height.

Now he began to plan the future for her, as is the way of lovers, and all he planned included himself as her constant companion and sweetheart. He would go on and sell his load and bring all to her, and he would get a license in Plainsville, and Preacher Price would marry them, as soon as he returned. And they would live in a little house somewhere, and he would hire out to some of the low-country farmers with his mules, and all would be well with them until the revenue officers would have cleared the Cove of the Furmans. Then they would go back there and take possession, and Lury would come into her own. They would not have to go to law about it, for it would all come about so naturally. The Furmans would go the way of all evil-doers, for they would be arrested or die of drink, as Jim Furman's father had done.

"Why, Lury, th' be 'nough licker thar in th' cave fer to

bring you five hundred dollars, 'er a heap mo'n thet, maybe a thousand, — an' not what they hev made since your paw were killed, either. The hull on hit be yourn. Hit be'n layin' thar sence way back. I reckon some on hit has laid thar fer nigh on to twenty years. An' hit's yourn — like I tells ye. They won't nobody find hit, and they cain't sell hit, since I hev quit 'em. Ev'ybody down below knows th' Furmans, an' ef they 'low to tote hit therse'fs, th' officers'll hev 'em on th' chain gang' fore they c'n turn round to go back up mountain. I wisht now I hadn't gone to see ol' man Arl'nton, fer he mount tote fer 'em, er Sim Arl'nton, one, but they won't stay by long, ef so be they do, fer th' Arl'ntons cain't stan' fer Ellen, no way."

"Dave, could you git her indited fer trying to pizen Honey-Son? She'd ought to be."

"She hed ought to be — an' — ef — ef she do a thing to me — I'll hev her indited fer hit too."

"Dave! She cain't do nothin' to you, can she, Dave? Can she?" Lury raised her head and gazed into his eyes with a frightened stare.

"I do' know what she mount lay out to do. She honin' oveh some devilment, I can see that."

"She be always grumblin' somethin' 'bouts you, Dave. I hearn her a heap o' times, but I 'lowed she on'y do hit to skeer me, an' make me stan' by an' he'p her. Dave, ef she do meanness to you, I'll pizen 'er. I'll fetch rattlers to bite her. I'll—"

"Haish, Lury. She hain't got no mo' power to hurt me 'n she has to climb up an' knock Dan M'Cune's eagles off'n the rock thar."

"She mount do hit weth a gun, Dave."

"Ef she go fer me weth a gun, she'll lie in jail fer th' rest on her days."

"But, Dave, some one shot my paw, an' nobody hev be'n took fer hit."

"Yore paw, he were some diffunt. I hear the mules stompin' down thar. I'll tote you and Honey-Son long back to th' Settlement, an' you bide long of ol' Miz Basle, ontwel I come back weth th' license." He carried the child down to the wagon and laid him, still sleeping, on the fodder in the back and returned to her, where she sat waiting, looking into space, dazed, and wondering at Dave and what he had said to her, and at the mystery which his love-making had wrought in her.

He came bounding back and stooped over her.

"Be ye ready, Lury?" She lifted her long lashes, and her eyes looked dreamily and wistfully into his, but she sat still and said not a word. Then he lifted her to her feet and took her in his arms, and his body trembled in his eagerness that had so swiftly come upon him. "You 'er goin' to be my ol' woman f'om now on, Lury. Say ye be." He kissed her lips then, and the sweet, new feeling of being loved, — with a love such she had never known but to give to her baby brother, — such as had never entered her thought as being given to her, turned her faint with joy. She swayed in his arms and clung to him. "Ye be goin' to be my ol' woman, Lury?"

"I be, Dave."

"I reckon th' be no one livin' on earth c'd git you away f'om me, Lury."

"I reckon not, Dave."

Then in happy silence they walked down to the wagon,

and he lifted her to the seat at his side, and they drove on to the widow's home, the two happiest beings on the mountain-side. In Dave's joyous and sanguine nature there was never a fear — never a doubt.

"Hit be a heap easier to quit an' leave 'em be thar, long's you'n me'll be ol' man 'n' ol' woman to each other. They'll see-saw an' fight an' drink an' gin'lly raise hell an' git ketched in ther devilment; 'n' when they be th'ough 'n' in jail fer sich, we c'n go back an' live like we'd ought, an' pull easy together, jes' like them mules. They knows betteh 'n to pull agin one 'nother, an' so'll we. I c'n jes' set here an' drive, 'th one han', an' leave my arm be roun' you, Lury, fer th' rest o' our lives. Jes' so."

While they were contentedly driving thus, Ellen Furman was making her way back to the Cove from Plainsville. A new question had come up to trouble her. After they were well rid of David Turpin, and he had taken his mules and wagon with him, or sold them, how were they to get rid of their product without hiring some one else? For even if she should make the trips down herself, as she was determined to do, they had no wagon and only the old mule she was now riding, — the one that "kicked", as Lury had explained to Daniel McEwen on that eventful morning. Leaning forward and chewing her snuffstick, Ellen struck the heels of her heavy shoes into the old mule's sides and planned and schemed.

The widow Basle stood in her doorway watching the village below her small hillside cabin, interested in all that went on there and pleased with the life and stir that had come to the place in the last two years. She spied Dave's wagon and wondered that it did not turn toward the store,

until it swung up toward her own door. Then she spied Lury's happy face under its great hood and smiled contentedly.

"Howdy, Dave. Wall, howdy, Lury. I heared you was down to the school-house yestidy, an' thar ye went off up th' mountain 'thout givin' me a word. Miz Graves, she b'en oveh an' tol' me all what be'n done to ye. I says then Ellen betteh hide her haid 'er git out 'o th' country, one. You jes' light, both on ye, an'—How?" She stopped and looked at Dave, who had leaped from the wagon and stood close at her side, speaking in a low tone. She stared at what he said and glanced from him to Lury, who could not hear them from her seat under the hood. He spoke hurriedly — eagerly, but in low tones.

"Th' be betteh fer ye to do 'n that, Dave," she said at last. "Lury hain't mo'n fryin' size yit, she be that young. Leave 'er bide weth me, an' you git some decent work 'at's wuth doin' first. You be a good man, but you be in a bad business."

"Wall, I'm quit — soon's I sell this 'er load, fer she got to hev th' money. What I got here'd ought to bring her thirty-five dollars, maybe fifty er mo'n thet. An' she need hit, too, fer th' won't be nothin' else fer 'er, afteh I quit. She hev th' kid to do fer, too. Don't you work gin me, please, ma'am, fer — hits a heap betteh I marry her — an' — keep keer on 'er. They be nobody but me to do hit. Ellen Furman, she'll do a heap o' quare talkin' an' — they's — I reckon I betteh marry Lury. I'm on my way to Plainsville now fer th' license, an' when I git back, I'll git th' preacher — yas'm." He returned to the wagon and lifted Lury down. Their eyes met as he did so, and

the widow saw in that one glance between them that Lury had indeed become a woman.

She hastened forward then and spoke kindly, leading the sleepy boy by the hand, yet she looked doubtful. "Dave be'n tellin' me what-all you layin' out to do, betwixt ye. Wall, th' be a heap to say, an' th' be a heap I mount say what I hain't goin' to say, fer hit wouldn't do no good. Ef ye be sot, ye be sot, but I'll do what I kin fer ye. Come in, Dave, come in an' set."

"Thank ye, I'll git on." Dave's manner was shy and awkward, as he mounted to his seat under the wagon hood. He said not a word to Lury, but as he drove away, he looked again in her eyes, and she in his, and it was plainer than words, — the silent speech of their glances. "I'll not be round likely befo' to-morrow 'er maybe th' day a'ter. Hit'll be a long way 'round goin', but a short way back when I'm th'ough." He laughed and drove away, looking back from time to time around the hood of the wagon, although Lury had disappeared into the cabin with the widow.

CHAPTER XX

THE ARREST

It was a long way going, as Dave had said, but he found it longer returning. He made a detour to sell his load at a few places of distribution, because he did not wish to arrive in Plainsville until it was all disposed of. He suspected from Ellen's manner and her leer after him as he drove away from the Cove, that her sinister design might be to set the officers on him as he went with the liquor in his wagon. To be "caught with the stuff" was his only fear, and to rid himself of it was his first care. Thus it happened that he lay out all night near Rock Creek, a few miles above Plainsville, after having sold all he had, and drove in early next morning with an empty wagon and a good wad of money in a little tobacco bag drawn up with a string.

His first act was to go to the Court-house for his license. Happy as a lord, he went out from the registrar's office with his little document in his pocket and strolled across the square to his team. They were tied to the rear of his wagon and were contentedly crunching corn. He removed their harness and leisurely brushed them off with a handful of fodder, and then crawled into the wagon and stretched himself on the bed of corn fodder therein. Taking the license from his pocket, he examined it all over with great care. He could not read a line of it, but the registrar had

read it carefully through to him, and he was well pleased with the contents.

He was not sure that Lury was of marriageable age, but he had sworn that she was, which would do quite as well, and he was troubled with no compunctions of conscience therefor. Then he counted carefully the contents of the little cotton tobacco bag, and found it to contain over a hundred dollars, and his heart leaped within him.

"Now, who would a' thunk I hed took in th' hull o' that! Hit be hern, thet's what." Then he unfolded from its brown paper wrapping a little cotton handkerchief which he had spied at Ross's store after he parted from Lury at the widow's and had thought too pretty to belong to any one but Lury. It was scalloped all around with blue cotton thread, and bright pink roses were worked in the corners. He examined this also carefully and picked at the threads to see if it was strong.

"Th' hain't nothin' too putty fer her, now I tell ye," he said, holding it off at arm's length and addressing it admiringly. Then he folded the license around the little bag of money and tied both up in the small cotton square, and again wrapped all in the brown paper and tied the compact parcel carefully about with red twine. "Thar!" he said contentedly, and thrust it in his trousers pocket; then, turning over on that side, he placed his hands beneath his cheek and soon was soundly sleeping.

He had need of the rest, for he had been traveling since four that morning, in his eagerness to have the license safely in his pocket. All had gone well, and his heart was light, and he slept as sweetly as a babe, while his mules finished crunching their corn and drowsed and rested.

He was awakened from pleasant dreams by a rough voice and a commanding tone. "Git up, young man. Ye no need to sleep now. Ye'll hev plenty o' sleepin' time later."

He lifted his head suddenly and beheld the round, red face and fat shoulders of the sheriff leaning over him from the wagon seat where the man had climbed to get a good hold of him should he attempt to draw a "gun" or show any resistance. Two other men stood at the tail-board of his wagon, gazing at him curiously. They were there to help the sheriff, should there be any trouble, and also to enjoy the excitement of the arrest.

Dave laughed sleepily, contentedly, and raised himself on his elbow. "Aw, quit yer foolin'," he said. "You-uns think I c'd git into Plainsville weth a load o' licker 'thout you-uns gittin' holt on hit an' bein' cl'ar plumb drunk 'fore now? Quit!" he shouted again, as the sheriff produced a pair of handcuffs and proceeded to secure him by the wrists. "Sarch th' wagon, ef ye don't believe me. Th's nary a jug thar."

"This 'er no foolin' matter, son," said the sheriff, as he fastened the irons on Dave's wrists, while the men held his feet. "You no need to kick, an' they's no good resistin' th' law."

Then Dave sat up in the fodder and cursed, deeply and roundly. "Sich a fool business! What you doin' this fer, anyhow? Who be'n settin' ye on me? What fer?" he at last found breath to ask.

"You haish up, an' come along o' me, an' ye'll know what fer, right soon," was the reply. "Hit's betteh to go whar ye'r wanted peaceably, weth no resistance, er hit'l

go a heap harder weth ye. When this 'er' warrant is read to ye, ye'll find out hit's murder in th' fust degree, an' thet's a hangin' offense. Ye'll do a heap betteh to —"

"Who's be'n kilt?" asked Dave, stopping in his dazed fury to wonder, for strangely enough he did not think of the murder of two years past of which he was so entirely innocent. That had been an accepted thing, and in his mind was so just and right that there could never be a question of arrest for any one, except in the crazy mind of Ellen Furman, and for the moment he had forgotten her threat of the morning before. So much happiness had come into his life since then, that it had been swept clear of her scurrilous words. His arrest now seemed preposterous to the point of being a practical joke.

He stood silent a moment, then began to laugh. Quietly he laughed and chuckled. "I reckon you-uns thinks this be a good joke," he said. "Ye mount take them irons off an' leave me be, now, ef ye th'ough weth yer fun."

But the sheriff made no reply and grimly led him on. In his own mind he had no idea that the boy had really done the deed, for it was not like Dave, and yet he had seen him in a rage before now, when he could believe it possible for him to do anything. "Dave hev fieh an' spunk 'nough to kill a hundred ef he got goin'," he said to himself.

In the court-house the warrant was read to him pompously in due form, and the whole sinister aspect of the indictment began to dawn on him. Nevertheless the impossibility of its amounting to anything cheered him, and he walked across the square again towards the county jail nonchalantly. While the men were searching his wagon, where

they stopped to see if there were any liquor, in spite of Dave's denial, he spied his friend, Sim Arlington, who, seeing him in trouble, came to him.

"Howdy, Sim," he said quietly. "Put yer han' in my hip pocket, will ye, an' take out thet bun'el. They'll sarch me nex', an' this be none o' mine. Hit's Lury Bab's. Say, quick, don't 'low 'em to see ye. Say, you take hit to Lury, will ye, fer me? She's down to ol' Miz Basle's. Say, you tell 'er to stay weth the widder, will ye? Tell 'er to bide right thar till I come fer 'er, will ye? An', say, tell 'er to keep thet thar paper fer me, till I come to 'er, will ye?"

"Sure I'll do hit fer ye. What's th' row? Up fer licker sellin'?"

"Naw, hit's thet thar damned hell cat to th' Cove; she gitt'n' smart, an' has hed me indicted fer killin' Lee Bab, when th' hull mountain knows Jim Furman done hit. Say, I done be'n to your paw's to git ye to tote fer 'em. Don't ye tote a single jug fer 'em. Let 'em go to hell thar, an' tell Lury keep away. I'll git cl'ar, an' hev Ellen Furman indicted fer pizenin' er tryin' to pizen Lury's leetle brotheh. Tell 'er I be all right. I got th' bottle what helt the stuff, an' kin sw'ar I hauled hit out'n the fireplace the mawnin' afteh she done hit an' th'owed hit thar. You tell Lury keep still ontwel I git cl'ar, an' I'll hev thet thar low-down bitch jailed fer life, fer what she done to Lury's leetle brotheh. You tell 'er —"

The return of the sheriff cut him short, and the two friends clasped hands and looked in each other's eyes significantly, but the only thing they heard Dave say to Sim was: "Say, gin me a leetle tobacca, will ye?" and Sim obeyed.

Left alone in the county jail, poor David sat for hours

with bowed head. To be arrested for liquor selling was one thing and meant very little to him, for he could easily pay his fine and go free, and take up the work again with more caution. But to sit there and ponder over the meanness of the woman who had done this thing and understand that there was no chance to go free, even until the time of his trial, by a fine or any other means, was quite another thing.

He was glad he had seen Sim Arlington, thus to send word to Lury; and he knew she would do her best to get word to some who would interest themselves in getting him an early trial. That was all that was necessary, — just to have the chance to tell folks he had had nothing to do with it, because he was down the mountain. The Furman boys knew he was off with a load, and the whole thing was folly and spite on the part of Ellen.

Little did he dream of the ways of lawyers and courts of justice. It was the first time he had ever been arrested, in spite of his many trips with illicit supplies, and his complete innocence of the crime prevented him from realizing the gravity of his plight. The real blow was to his self-respect, and the separation from Lury.

No sooner was Lury taken in by the widow Basle than that good woman was told by her all her troubles, fluently and eagerly. It was right that the widow should know, and who could advise and help better than she? No longer was Lury silent or inscrutable. With the simplicity of a child, she laid her head on the good woman's knee and sobbed and told all: the loneliness and sorrow of her life, — the cruel innuendoes of Ellen, — and the terror of her soul lest some evil befall David or her little brother — some evil at which

Ellen had many times hinted would come if Lury ever left the Cove to live elsewhere.

What Dave could have done she did not know, or what she herself had done to make Ellen say so often: "Ef eveh ye go down to Woodville, ye won't know what struck ye. They'll spit on ye."

"Wall, don't ye think abouts hit. They be nothin mean 'nough fer Ellen to think, an' I tell ye leave go thinkin' 'bouts her an' bide right here. I'll go oveh to Miz Graves, an' see kin ye go to school thar, an' do somethin' fer yer schoolin'. You'd ought to l'arn to read an' write, like yore maw done. She hed schoolin' fore eveh she come oveh this side th' mountain."

"Maw done teached me a leetle, an' she were goin' to l'arn me mo'; she done tole me so, — she l'arnt me a heap o' letters —" Lury caught her breath sobbingly as she thought of the beloved mother, and Honey-Son trotted to her and patted her flushed cheek, giving baby sympathy. "Look at him," she said. "Hain't he sweet? I'd like fer Honey-Son to l'arn read'n' an' writin'. I'll work fer him, I will, an' he'll be a gre't man some day. Maybe he'll be a preacher like preacher Price. I'd like to see Honey-Son stan'in' up thar, jes' layin' hit off to 'em. I reckon he so smart he'd make 'em skeerder o' hell 'an preacher Price kin."

"I reckon, but you'd ought to gin him a name o' his own. Hit be a shame an' crime to make 'im grow up 'thout no name but Honey-Son. You' maw wouldn' like to hev 'im grow up that heathen, no name, pore leetle feller."

"Yas, he hev a name, but I hain't tole nobody — fer — fer the' mount tell me go to hell fer sich — leastways up to

the Cove they would. Paw, he'd rise in he's grave an' haunt me, ef he knowed what I hev named Honey-Son."

"What hev ye named 'im? I won't tell on ye."

"In the night, when hit be so dark the' won't nobody see, I jes' reach out an' tech 'im so, an' tell Gawd his name be — Dan'l Cloud. Then in the mawnin', when folks be thar, I jes' call 'im Honey-Son. Hain't nobody but Gawd know'd his rale name. He got a right to Cloud, fer hit were maw's name; he got a right to hit." She said this last defiantly, as if it might be taken from him, even by allowing the widow to know. "He got a right to t'otheh name, too, fer Dan M'Cune he l'arnt me how to feed 'im an' keer fer 'im, an' — an' — he gin me th' cow — he gin me Josephine."

"How do ye know he gin ye Josephine?"

"You knows he done hit."

"Whateveh did ye do weth th' cow?"

"I done brung 'er back up th' mountain, when she run dry."

"An what 'd Dan'l M'Cune say when ye brung 'er back?"

"He didn' say nothin', jes' say tu'n her in th' lot, an' he ax' a heap 'bouts you-uns, an' 'bouts Honey-Son. Then he gin Honey-Son a gre't big hunk o' fine corn-brade 'n' 'lasses, an' put 'im on the mule's back an' led 'er half-way down th' mountain, an' axed me a heap 'bouts how I livin' an' I didn' let on nothin', jes' tol' 'im I git'n' on right smaht."

"Wall, you be'n a leetle fool. What fer didn' ye tell 'im the truth, like ye be'n tellin' me? He mount 'a' hep'd ye out o' thar."

"I neveh baigs fer nothin'. Maw, she kep' 'er mouth shet, an' she l'arnt me how to keep mine shet."

"What eveh put hit in yer head to carry the cow back thar?"

"I hearn Ellen tell Joe Furman she were goin' to git a boy come thar 'n' carry Josephine down to Woodville an' sell 'er fer beef. She know'd betteh 'n to tell Dave do sich es thet, but I know'd she'd do hit, an' I run off weth 'er, an' she neveh know'd what-all done come weth the cow. She were drunk thet day, an' neveh know'd I were gone. Thet's hu-come I done hit."

"Wall, you be peert. You be wuth schoolin', an' I'll tell Miz Graves. She'd ought to hev help, fer her sister hain't none too strong."

"I reckon Dave, he'll be back fer me right quick."

"I reckon ye'd do a heap betteh to bide right long weth them good sisters, an' leave Dave git a start fust."

Lury's red lips lost their sweet curves in an instant and set in a thin, straight line, and her eyes took on a dreamy inscrutability, as they gazed straight before her out of the open cabin door.

"Ye'd betteh think twice 'fore ye marry Dave. You'll git no schoolin' an' hev no money to school yer leetle brotheh, — an' —"

"Dave say as how he'll gin 'im schoolin.' He done said so."

The set look in Lury's face warned the widow that she would gain nothing by opposition, and she grew more politic. "Mind, I hain't sayin' one word gin Dave. He be peert 'nough an' good, fer all I knows, but he hev a heap to do 'fore he c'n marry, an' he may come fer ye soon, an' he mount be late; an' ontwel he do come, ye mount's well be doin' fer yerse'f a leetle."

"I'll do all I kin to he'p out, but th' hain't nothin' fer him to do but git th' license an' th' preacher."

"An' whar 'll ye live at?"

"Dave'll fin' a place to live at. He say so."

"An' what'll ye live on?"

"Dave, he say, he'll do haulin' weth his mule team, an' make a heap to live on. He say so."

"An' you goin' to leave the place up yandah to th' Furman's to live thar an' do weth hit as they like? Do Dave say sich es thet?"

"I reckon. We hain't no call to live weth 'em like we be'n doin'. Dave say he hev be'n wait'n' fer me to grow up. An' I be grow'd."

"Pore lamb!" said the widow. "I reckon th' be nothin' fer me to say er do. You jes' bide 'long o' me ontwel Dave come back." Nevertheless she did go over to the sisters and asked their advice about it; and their advice was to wait. Maybe the Lord would provide a way out of the dilemma. It was often so. The very things which we thought in our ignorance were all wrong turned out to be the best in the end.

"Meybe so," sighed the widow. "Anyhow, th' be nothin' fer we-uns to do now but wait, 's far's I see, ef th' Lord'll he'p — "

"Of course he will," cried Peg cheerily. "And I'll help the Lord."

"Why, Peg!" said Caroline, gently reproachful.

"Why, what's the matter with that? Aren't people always singing something about working for the Lord? Wouldn't that be helping? If you don't think it proper to say it, I'll sing it."

"Well, sing it, dear," said Elizabeth. "Tell them what you are really going to do, how you will help in this."

"Why, we'll build a little house for them and let them get married if they want to; and Lury can go on and learn at our school just the same, and Dave can work for us, and do hauling for the new building I am going to put up for you, and she can help you. And I am going to go all through these hills, and wherever I can find a girl who really wants to learn, I'm going to give her a home and have her taught the things she ought to know most, and get teachers to help you both — so you won't be killed doing charitable work for me and the Lord —"

"Peg!"

"Well, that's the way with a lot of people who think they are doing what they call 'The Lord's work', and being very charitable. They begin in the first place on such a grand scale that they don't have enough left over to pay their teachers nor the ones on whom they must depend to carry out their grand schemes, and then they load them with things to do and look after until they go to pieces and die of overwork, and never get the credit for all they have done. It is always the ones who have given the money, not the ones who have given their very lives —"

"Well, dear, those get the credit who deserve it in the long run," said Elizabeth.

"Well, I don't propose that either of you will have to wait for that long run to get the credit. I'm not going to begin so big that I can't carry it through without making life a burden to some one. I'm going to take care of twenty girls, — have everything right, you know, and do it right

here, where you have begun. It's your beginning, not mine. You gave me the idea, — I won't try to say all the things I've been thinking, but this: if you didn't do a single thing, Aunt Caroline, but just *be*, just *live* right with those girls and *be*, — you know what I mean, — they'd grow good and sweet and — a lot of things they'd never understand — or know — or feel — just living here and hearing you talk and watching you *be* — your own selves."

Barney sat over by the window with a book, and now and then he lifted his eyes, all his attention on Peg, and never a thought for his book. Peg, glowing and happy, was not thinking of him at all. He knew that, and although he did not begrudge her the happiness, he felt a little pang of pity for himself. Yes, money gave women power, and with power they were satisfied and intoxicated, and men were left out. He could never be anything to her. Why was he hanging around her? He rose and walked out, and sat on the hillside and whittled a stick.

As he sat there, Honey-Son trotted over to him, and he coaxed him into his arms and comforted himself with the beautiful child. He wished Peg could care for him and the kind of a home he could give her, and he would be willing to sweep all these other interests out of her life. Barney was selfish in all this when he thought himself really generous and rather misused — for was he not willing to throw at Peg's feet all he had and all he was, his life and heart and soul? While she was striking out for power and her own will and independence, regardless of him, so he thought.

Thus he brooded as he sat with his arm around the child; and it was there, amusing the little one, that Peg found him,

half an hour later. That he admired and amused the little one did not injure him in Peg's eyes. Right there he had his lesson to learn, but Barney was so filled with his own ideas that he was slow to appreciate hers, or to realize their importance, and Peg knew this.

CHAPTER XXI

PEG'S WAY

"Oh, you little love!" cried Peg.

"Who? me?" grinned Barney, holding the boy tightly and refusing to let him free, when Peg coaxed.

"Of course, Mr. O'Harrow. Come, let me have him. Don't be a piggy. He likes me best, anyway, don't you, Honey-Son? See how he's struggling to get away from you."

"He was contented enough before you came here. Don't leave me, boy."

"There, of course he'll leave you, when you hold him against his will. So would I. So would any one."

"I wouldn't hold you against your will. I couldn't."

"Oh, I don't know. You'd never get the chance." Peg cuddled the little fellow and lifted him to her knee and clasped her bracelet around his arm.

"No, you carry bribes. I'd never take bribes."

Peg seated herself on a small ledge of rock some distance from Barney, and now that she had succeeded in getting the child away from him, she deliberately turned her attention to taunting him.

"Bribes aren't offered you, sir." She found a red feather from a cardinal bird's wing and proceeded to tickle the baby's ear with it. He would have seized it, but she held it out of his reach. "No, you little scamp. You'd spoil

the pretty feather. Watch his dimples now, when he smiles. Aren't they fascinating?"

"They are, indeed." Barney was not looking at the child, and Peg had dimples of her own.

"Aunt Elizabeth is over at the widow Basle's trying to get his sister to stay here with us. Mrs. Basle thinks she ought to live with us and be 'l'arnt read'n' an' writ'n'.' But she's just determined to marry that young man who brought her back, — the esquire I told you about who fixed the tug for us the other day."

"She's nothing but a kid herself. What should she get married for? She'd better listen to Mrs. Basle and your aunt."

"She won't, though. She says he'll be here to-night or to-morrow with the license, and then they'll be married, — no place to live, — no relatives to go to and not a cent, that we know of."

"He'll have some money about him, never you fear for that; and if he hasn't, it wouldn't make any difference. They are the most improvident people, — the merest children."

"She says if he leaves the Cove, he must have her to 'do' for him. If she cares anything for him, I think that's pretty good sense for such a girl, and I don't see why she shouldn't. He's an awfully attractive mountain boy. You remember I said so that time."

"I remember, indeed."

"Did you hear what I advised, in there, when we were talking of it?"

"I heard a little of it, yes, but not to take it in; something about twenty girls to be fed and cared for and taught for

nothing at your expense; I thought your plans were all very good, but did not concern me, so I —"

"Oh, of course — naturally nothing would interest you — but something that would concern you. Come, Honey-Son. We'll go find sister."

"Peg. Come back, Peg. I — I'm a — a bear. Peg —"

"Say by-by to the man, baby. Nice man. Say by-by."

But the baby only smiled and showed the delightful dimples and said "Howdy." Barney leaped after them, caught the little fellow in his arms and tossed him high in air, whereat he screamed with laughter. It was the way Dave had of treating him, and he was used to the rough play.

"Oh, come on back, Peg, and let Mrs. Basle and Lury and your Aunt Elizabeth have it out together. Honey-Son likes me. He says 'Howdy'; he doesn't say by-by. Come be friends, Peg. I don't see why we always have to quarrel."

"We don't have to, and it isn't my fault. I try to be friendly, and to tell you things, but you toss them off as if they were just nothing on earth — and to me they are something." She turned with him, and they began walking up the path toward the spring.

"Well, you see, Peg, — of course your plans do mean a lot to you; and that's just it — they don't —"

"Mean anything to you. Go on."

"Don't put your own interpretation on everything I say. I am not fluent, as you are — but I do think things sometimes — that are not easily expressed; and I am — I am terribly interested in all you say and all you are wishing to do — and — and yet — it sort of shuts me out, don't you

see. I'm out of it — of no use to you — so I just step out of the way."

"Well, you are very stupid. Why do you think I am always trying to get your advice and telling you things if — if — I want you out of the way?"

"But, Peg, I can't stand it. I just can't stand it. You don't understand how a man feels when he sees he's absolutely nothing — only a sort of — friend and advisor thing to a woman — like — a computing machine to a bank clerk — or an encyclopædia of useful information about things, and all that; that he has no part in and can have no part in, even if he would — he doesn't — he — "

Barney grew incoherent. He was carrying the child on his shoulder, and the baby arms were clasped tightly around his head. Carefully he held the drooping branches from brushing the little one's face, or swinging back and striking Peg as they passed. Peg was watching him, as well as listening, and was following in his wake as docilely as the lamb followed the historic Mary.

"No, of course he doesn't, Barney — if he only would!"

"Would what?" he fenced, with a rigid set of his jaw.

"My goodness, Barney! You have just said. Can't you see how you have just admitted that you are out of the things I am interested in, and that they are of no use to you. I know well enough that young men feel a girl ought not to be interested in anything but — sewing and cooking and — and dancing attendance on some young man. You are so absolutely unfair. How would you like it if we apportioned off a very narrow list of things that we decided young men ought to be interested in, to the exclusion of all else, no matter what your tastes might be, — and then

held you to our notions, or else snubbed you, or went off and sulked, or stalked around feeling very superior?"

"Here we are. Let's sit up there by the spring, where this talk really began, and have the thing out. Run and play, little man." Barney set the child down on the path and gave him a little willow whip. "Now, run up and down and drive the horse. That's right."

He turned and gave his hand to Peg, helping her up the low bank to their seat of the previous day. She did not need his help, but she took it as women always do take the masculine arm or hand, and she liked it — even as women do.

He spread his coat for Peg to sit upon and bent a branch to keep it from annoying her. She glanced at him merrily out of the corner of her eye and laughed.

"Now what have I done?"

"Nothing. You have just been very nice, that's all. Now, Barney O'Harrow," she continued, "you don't want me to be interested in anything that does not include you and put you first and foremost in my thoughts and my life, or that would ever divide my interests so that they would not be wholly and completely centered in you. And you are jealous of my money, because it looms so large in your thought that you even think it sets me above you; and you are not glad to have me, even in the false estimates of the world, set even the least little inch above you — because you want to be the important one. I am just going to tell the truth for once in my life. You think you are in love with me; and you are not really, for if you were, you would be glad of everything good and great that is mine, no matter how it might affect you. You'd be

glad for me to have interests that are wide and helpful and make me happy, whether they concerned you or not, or whether I cared more for them than I do for you or not — and it's mostly not — only you are too stupid to see it, Barney. Stay away. You shan't touch me till I'm through. I understand you, and you thought I did not. You want to be 'Highcockalorum' and 'Grand Mogul', giving everything and appropriating everything, and — and — being everything, making me be you — and not myself. That's masculine. Men want to apportion our lives and our loves and our tastes, and they want them to be all man-ward. While *we* want you to do things and care for things out in the world and be wide in your interests. We despise you if you are narrow, and we don't want you to be tied to women's apron-strings. Why can't you be as generous to girls? Why must you presume to dictate even one thing to them? Would you allow them to do that to you? Why —"

Peg's voice became suddenly smothered against Barney's breast, and her lips were stopped, and they trembled so when they were free to speak again, that she could not finish her argument.

"Barney O'Harrow, you haven't — said a word!"

"How could I? You've said it all, Peg; and it's all true, as true as gold. And it can't be helped — it's masculine — as you said, and you have to put up with it— if you have anything to do with us. We have to learn to be really generous and fair, by main force, for we want you — to be us, to belong to us — we would devour you, we love you so — we — we can't help it, and — you — you wouldn't like us if we helped it. We wouldn't be men."

Peg laughed happily.

"Did — did I understand you, Barney?"

"You did. You've scored one against me, and you've got your reward — you've got a bear on your hands for the rest of your life."

"And did — you understand me, as you thought you did, Barney?"

"I — well — I may have understood you, but then again, I may have misjudged you a little."

"I'll put it plainly. You thought I did not love you."

"I wouldn't intrude myself on you enough to find out. Why should you? I had nothing to offer you."

"You had nothing to offer but a very stupid boy, Barney O'Harrow. I told you all the time you were stupid, and you wouldn't believe me. You thought I would put my money in the scales and weigh my dollars against your love, and you didn't know that they counted against you only so much as you made them count. You made them mountain high, Barney. You held out your hand to help me up that little bank of moss that I could dance over, and then you made me climb alone over that mountain of dollars to reach your love that had outweighed them so that it was away down on the other side, and I almost broke my heart trying to get to you —"

Again she found her lips stopped and her voice smothered. "I'm in the dust at your feet, Peg. You are on the tip-top of your mountain of gold, and I am just crawling up to you, inch by inch, Peg. I am."

"Well, I guess I'm through talking. I've given up, and you may have all your own way — and thank the Lord, you have a way. You wouldn't be loved by me a

minute if you hadn't. Can you say that about me, Barney?" Peg's eyes were suspiciously misty, and Barney's voice was very tender as he made reply.

"I can. I — I'll make your way, your sweet way —".

But Peg never learned what he would make it, except by experience through the rest of the years, for at that moment they were awakened to reality by a piercing scream. Honey-Son had fallen in the spring, where he had been switching the water with his willow whip, to make it splash.

Barney lifted him out, and Peg had him in her arms in an instant, regardless of the wetting she got.

"You darling little thing. Did Peg forget him. You dear! There! We'll go find sister. You little love. That's right — laugh about it. See his dimples, Barney; did you ever see anything prettier or lovelier than this child?"

"Yes," said Barney, stoutly contradicting her. "Let me have him. You are getting yourself in a terrible mess with his wet, dirty clothing."

"Then you'll be in a mess; and I have things here to change and you haven't."

"Well, put him on his feet, then, and we'll lead him between us." So they led him, each taking a hand, in one of which he still clutched the whip. "You've got some mud on your face, from his little paws."

"Where?"

"Here." Barney wiped it away with his handkerchief and kissed the place. "Wait, I think there's a little on the other cheek."

"No, there isn't."

"But I'm sure there is, and on your lips too. Now, hold still."

"Barney! I never thought you'd be — be —"

"But you see I would. I've suffered enough from my own fault. I'm — different. I'm — There!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE WAY OF PROGRESS

"I GOT to git Honey-Son some more clo's some way, fer I hain't be'n back sence I run away that night. Seem like hit's be'n a y'ar sence then, an' hit's on'y three days gone."

Lury was standing under the great tree where Mrs. Basle's big wash-kettle hung, and the two of them were working at the same tub, wringing out the garments and dropping them in a large splint basket. Honey-Son was asleep after his dip in the spring, and Lury was washing his little dress to put on him when he awoke. She held it up by the two sleeves and examined it carefully.

"I has to wash his clo's most ev'y night whilst he be sleepin', he runnin' 'round so into ev'ything. He be peert, kin do mos' ev'y kind o' thing. He be'n growin' so big, an' Buddy, he so stunted an' leetle, Ellen she done took th' bes' things I had fer Honey-Son and put 'em on Buddy, ontwel they be cl'ar plumb wore out."

"Wall, thet be th' way weth chil'en — always somethin' to git fer 'em, ef ye keep 'em decent."

"Dave say he goin' to bring me eve'y cent he git fer this load, to make up fer the things they hev' took from me. Dave say —"

"Howdy, Miz Basle. Howdy, Lury." Sim Arlington stood before them, hat in hand, holding his mule by the bridle.

"Howdy, Sim?" said the widow. "Come in and set."

"I cain't set, thank ye. I has to git on." Sim shifted from one foot to the other. His was a hard message to deliver.

"Hu-come you weth Dave's mule?" asked Lury wonderingly.

"He tol' me take th' mule and git 'long right smaht, to fetch you-uns this er — he done sont ye." He handed the little package to Lury, just as David had given it to him.

She turned it over in her hand without untying it, waiting — wondering. Something was surely wrong, or Dave would never have let Sim ride the mule or send her something he could bring himself.

"Dave say keep hit ontwel he come fer hit. He say —"

"Whar be he?"

"He oveh to Plainsville. He —" Honey-Son cried out, and Lury ran into the cabin, and held him tightly in her arms, while she opened the package which so stirred her curiosity and imagination. It was very strange. What was Dave doing there? Looking for work, maybe.

With quivering fingers, she removed the brown paper. The license she could not read, but she guessed what it was. She laid it by while she shook out the handkerchief and untied the little bag. She hugged them to her breast and kissed Honey-Son. Again and again she kissed him, as she had never done before — as Dave had kissed her. Then she wrapped the bag of money in the handkerchief as Dave had done, and thrust them in her bosom. Taking up the license, she examined it with great care, holding it upside down and sidewise and rightside up in turn. Then she looked up and saw Sim mount and ride away.

"Sim, Sim," she called after him, running to the door. "Sim, whar be Dave at?"

"Neveh you mind," said the widow, wiping the suds from her hands and coming slowly toward the door. "You git Honey-Son's clo's dryin', so ye c'n git 'im dressed. Sim say Dave, he hain't ready to come to-day. What's thet ye hid'n' in yer dress? Cain't ye 'low me to look at hit?"

Lury handed her the license, and the widow read it laboriously through. She looked very grave, and Lury was filled with concern at the mysterious look of things.

"What be th' read'n' on hit?" she asked.

"Wall, ef ye'd do as I tell ye, an' bide along o' we-uns fer a while, ye mount l'arn to read sich es thet yerself. The' be no gret hurry fer hit, as I see. Hit be his license fer marryin', an' I reckon he'll hev to wait a time 'er two, ontwel he git somethin' to do, ruther 'n peddlin' licker." The widow walked slowly into the house and took down a long disused coffee-pot, in which she kept her money, when she had any to lay by. In it she placed the license, carefully standing the coffee-pot on a high shelf in the chimney corner.

"Thar! Hit'll be safe thar, gin he wants to use hit. I see he hain't got yore age right. He has hit sot down three y'ar too ol'.

"What fer he sot me down three y'ar ol'?"

"I say he got ye three y'ar mo' 'n ye be. I know how ol' ye be. Here. I'll pin this apron 'roun' Honey-Son, whilst ye git the clo's out in th' sun. You hang out mine, too, will ye? I hev to go oveh to Miz Graves, to tell 'er 'bouts th' weavin' she axed me to git done fer 'er."

She took off her blue gingham apron and tied it by the strings around the child's neck and waist, in such a way as to dress him comically in a waist and skirt, from which his bare limbs showed white and round, like those of a masquerading Cupid. Then the widow walked down to the school and Lury hung the clothes in the sun, and the baby ran after her. Now and then she stooped and petted him, or snatched him up and kissed him. Bob Kitchel, strolling aimlessly around the village, stopped to watch the pretty sight. Which was the prettier, Lury or the child, he did not know.

He was glad to see that she was back again and told her so. She only laughed happily, for over her heart lay the pretty handkerchief and the little bag of money. He tried to coax the baby to come to him, but the little imp only swung himself around in his sister's dress, as he had done on the hillside that day, and peeped at him with laughing eyes.

"Leave go, Honey-Son. Sisteh hev to work," she said. "He fell in the wateh, an' I has to git his clo's dry, fer he hain't no mo' down mountain."

"Then you didn't go back that day, after all?"

"No, I — I come back heah. Leave go, Hon. Sisteh cain' do nothin' weth you hangin' on this-a-way."

"Come, boy. I like little chaps. Come here." But the child would not.

"He be cl'ar plumb spoilt. He won't go to nobody, 'less he jes' take hit in his hade to go." She laughed again merrily. "He do look thet funny. Miz Basle she done tie 'im up that-a-way ontwel I git his clo's dry." She caught him up in her arms again and bore him into the

cabin. "I'll gin 'im somethin' to eat, to keep 'im good whilst I git th'ough." Bob watched her disappear in the shadows of the interior and then strolled on.

Meantime the widow and the sisters and Peg were earnestly consulting as to what they could do. Should Lury be told the truth? How might Dave be helped? The trials and sorrows of their neighbors were their own.

"I reckon th' be nothin' to do but tell 'er. She'll be boun' to hear some way. Bad news travels fast, they say."

"Oh, wait just a little. Maybe we can get Dave out some way. Barney, can't we have Ellen Furman taken up on the charge of giving Lury's little brother that stuff?"

"If we could get the evidence, we could, but there is nothing to prove it was not an accident. All we could do would be to stop its sale here, I'm afraid." Barney scowled because he could not do exactly the thing Peg wished. "You might wait a little, before telling her, and I'll go to Plainsville and see Dave myself."

"I thought you were starting for Tennessee to-morrow," said Elizabeth.

"I've changed my mind since yesterday and am not going as soon as I had planned. We'll all go to that preaching together, first. I may be able to pick up something there that has a bearing on the case. We want to go to the preaching, don't we, Peg?"

"I reckon we'd all betteh go," said the widow. "I declare, I do' know what-all to say to Lury."

"Why, just tell her to wait for Dave and be patient. We'll get her interested in making her little brother some new clothes to wear to the preaching," said Caroline.

So the widow went back and told Lury to set right to

work on new dresses for Honey-Son, and she was full of the thought immediately. She showed the bag of money with glee, and good Mrs. Basle, not wishing to send Lury to the store, lest she hear the truth in regard to David, counted out a little and went over herself to buy the cloth, and set Lury the task of ironing out his one little dress in the meantime.

Thus the days flew by until Sunday, when they were to start early for an all-day excursion to the little hill church. By the gentlest and most tactful persuasion on the part of Peg, Lury was induced to accept a few clothes which she had brought for any who might need such help. She even allowed Lury to pay a small sum for one suit to use as a pattern to fashion others by.

Peg was settling down to her work, entering into all the details of the sisters' life, and helping them with delighted interest. "I'm so happy!" she said to Barney. "It is wonderful to have something to do that I can know is worth while. You know it is worth while, don't you, Barney?"

"Of course I know it, Peg! I'm learning my lesson. I'm staying on here just for the delight of learning it. Sweetest lesson any man ever learned and finest place to learn it — right here beside you on this settle, beside an autumn fire of logs. Here's the schoolroom all our own, you the teacher, and I the pupil. Ideal! Glory, but it is ideal! Own up, Peg. How soon do you think we can — set up for life on this basis?"

Peg made a little mouth at him. "You've only just made up your mind to — to —"

"Play second fiddle to you, Peg?"

"Dominate me for the rest of my days, you mean; can't you give me a little freedom first?"

Barney looked grave. "Let's not look on that aspect of the situation, dear. It's not good. I don't want to dominate. I really want to dance to your piping. I've been so situated that I have always had to dominate. I had to, Peg, to get anywhere."

"That is one reason I love you, dear. I really want you to dominate. I do. We'll both pipe, and we'll both dance, taking it turn about."

"Well, if you love me for it, tell me, how shall I dominate you first?"

"Order me to stay right here and do all I can to get things going the way they should be — and spend all the money I like on this work; and — order me to wait here for you as long as I please and — hunt up all the young women that need help — Oh, there is a lot you can make me do, if you like to try."

Barney laughed joyously. "That's the way to do. I understand. I'm beginning to dance. But, Peg, I want to make love to you a little. I never have. I want to court you a while, as they say down here."

"All right. I never have been really courted. You must get a buggy and take me out riding. I never went off buggy-riding with a young man in my life. You must have a flower in your buttonhole and bring me candy in a paper bag."

"I'm going to do it in my own way, young lady. Look at me!" Then Barney put in a few minutes making love to Peg in his own way. He made her hair look very frowzy and her eyes very bright, — but when the sisters came in

a few moments later, they found her seated on one settle and he on the other, but his eyes were also very bright and his lips were smiling a most contented smile.

A little later Bob appeared and walked discontentedly up and down the great room.

"Do come sit beside me, Bob, and stop looking so forlorn, — walking up and down there like a lost soul."

"I'm discontented. What are you hanging around here so long for? I thought we were going to housekeeping together in New York, or else going to travel for a while. This is stagnation. Barney, there, he has his job and sits with a smile like the cat who has eaten the canary. — By all the saints! I believe you *have* eaten the canary!"

Bob sprang forward and seized Barney's hand, then dropped on the settle beside his sister. "Kiss me, Peg. I say, sis, I'm lonely. A fellow gets lonely — left in the lurch like this." He stretched his long legs toward the fire and looked dreamily into the coals.

"Not so, Bob. Our relations remain the same. I'm your friend, and Peg's your sister. You can't monopolize her all your life, keeping house for you. Get some one else to keep house for you. My advice is —"

"Oh, you give advice, will you? Who was your advisor?"

"Well, Bob dear, you don't need to be so moody, when the rest of us are all happy, does he, Aunt Caroline? You and Aunt Elizabeth are happy, aren't you?"

"We are indeed, love."

"Now, there! And Barney's happy, and I'm happy, and you ought to be. Let's talk about something else. You'll go to 'preachin'' with us to-morrow, won't you?

Try to take a little interest in what I am going to do here. It ought to make you happy, just as it does me."

"Very well. What are you going to do about Lury Bab? She is the first responsibility you have just now, and I foresee she is to be one for quite a while. Dressing her and teaching her is not everything. I've been thinking about her. That fellow is jailed for life, or for death, — for they are likely to find a true bill against him, — and she was to marry him, poor kid, and no doubt he killed her old reprobate of a father. It's a miserable mess."

"She may make a splendid woman, Bob. She has it in her," said Elizabeth.

"Yes, and if she has, don't you see that our work is important down here? If he killed that man, this may be the saving of her, for she can't marry him now, can she?" Peg was emphatic.

"Not unless he can get free or is pardoned! Kissing goes by favor here. There is not much chance of real justice. If ever she is to marry that boy, of course she should not be educated and given a taste of the kind of life she might lead otherwise. That would be too cruel. That is the trouble with the kind of work you are setting out to do, anyway. As long as you can't change conditions, you would better leave these women alone. They can't be happy, if you don't."

"Why, Bob! What a heathenish idea! It is their education that will change their condition," said Caroline.

"Not by educating the girls alone. I can tell you that. How about the men?"

"I say Peg's idea is all right. You can take care of the men, if she looks after the girls, can't you?" cried Barney.

"You could set up a model community here, if you could regulate all their marriages, after you get them educated."

"If one could."

"I have an idea. Get all the men jailed and educate the girls. Jail the men for life or have them hung, and then a lot of you New York fellows, who have nothing to do but improve the race, come down here and marry the girls."

"Barney! You men don't either one of you realize the seriousness of the work here. Aunt Elizabeth, say something."

"I do realize it," cried Bob. "That's what I'm telling you. You don't realize yourself what you are undertaking; trying to change the destinies of men and women, — making a muddle of things half the time."

Bob still sat with his arm around Peg, his legs stretched toward the fire, and his chin on his breast. Elizabeth thought she understood him.

"It is the way of progress, at all events, Bob," she said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE "PREACHING"

It was a fair, sweet, October day, and the air was cool enough to make walking a delight. The Blue Ridge hills were their bluest, and rose from height to height out of a haze which veiled the gorgeous coloring of the foliage along their sides and settled in the hollows at their feet, iridescent, shifting, and deeply mysterious.

The whole Settlement seemed to be going to the "preaching", and the winding hill road which branched off from the new highway above Cloud's Mill and then crossed through a gap and curved around to a small settlement on the other side of the ridge, known as Gower's, was dotted with buggies and wagons drawn by oxen or mules, with riders, and those who climbed afoot in couples or in groups.

These last gradually scattered along diverging paths, taking short cuts, but all making toward one point. Many paths diverged, some used and beaten, and others mere thread-like footways, piercing dense undergrowth and leading often to a little waterfall or cool spring, and then back to the more trodden ways. They all touched the main road at intervals, often crossing it as it wound back and forth on its easy grade up the mountain.

There was only one regular two-horse carriage in the train, and that one Barney had motored down to Wood-

ville and engaged, because Peg wanted the sisters to ride in comfort, and the Deals needed their mule for their own use. The mother and daughter might have walked, for the sake of the fee, but the father was averse to so great an exertion; moreover, he had always gone to "preaching" in his own conveyance, with his wife and daughter, greeting his neighbors as they drove along, hearing bits of gossip here and there, with a sense of opulence in the ownership of wife and daughter, as well as of mule and high-top buggy.

"Paw" Deal was round-shouldered, stubbly of beard, chubby of figure, and unkempt of head, yet cleanly enough, as if used to at least a weekly scrubbing. The neat little wife attended to that. "Maw" and the daughter were both meagre and slight and dark, with bright, dark eyes not unlike polished chincapins, looking eagerly and alertly out from under their overhanging headgear. Two gaunt black hounds raced around them, as alert and eager as they.

The widow Basle rode with the sisters, and Honey-Son wriggled between her and the driver. She carried a paper bag of cookies to divert him at intervals, and these he divided impartially between his interior, his exterior, and the knees and coat-sleeve of the driver, and the widow's lap. Now and then he turned and glanced at Elizabeth with shy, bewitching smiles, looking out from under his long, curling lashes, and making dimples in his cheeks and dancing lights in his eyes.

"Did you ever see a child so good?" said she.

"He gitt'n' me a sight, puttin' his cake in his mouth and then gormin' hit all oveh my black dress. Set still, Hon. I has to give 'im somethin' to keep 'im f'om hollerin' fer Lury."

"She'd run and take him, if she heard him call for her, if she had to carry him all the rest of the way," said Caroline.

"She shore would. I tell 'er she hev 'im plumb spoilt."

"I can't say I like the idea of Peg's taking this long walk, not a step less than six miles by the short cuts, and they are all very steep. She's not used to it, Lizzie."

"She used to tramp the Alps farther than that, she said, — twenty miles a day, sometimes more."

"But she's out of practice now. Lury, of course, is different, but there! They would do it. Youth feels equal to anything, when —"

Caroline paused, and Elizabeth finished for her. "When she has Barney along. They would do it."

Lury was happy this Sunday morning. She was sure David would be there and would have his team, and they would all ride back in his canvas-covered wagon, seated on the fodder, and she would ride up on the seat beside him. She debated in her thoughts whether she should not tell him to ask Peg to sit there, but maybe Peg would rather ride behind with Barney O'Harrow.

As the carriage came creeping up toward them, the sisters noticed the transforming illumination of Lury's face. She was wholly one of them. No one would have dreamed that she was a lonely mountain girl, who could neither read nor write, and who had never entered any home other than a mountain cabin until she was carried into the schoolroom so short a time ago, in Bob Kitchel's arms. He more than all noticed the change. If such a miracle could be wrought by one of Peg's pretty dresses and a few days of her companionship and care, what wonder

might not be worked by a year of such living, let alone a year of effort toward improvement.

The party had all constituted themselves a sort of body-guard for the girl, they so dreaded the moment when she must know that her David Turpin might never return to her. It seemed wrong not to tell her, but as Peg said: "At least, try to get him out first." It might not be impossible to prove that it was all a trumped-up charge without any foundation. So as they continued their way, they kept her near them and watched every group they passed, lest it might be a party whom Lury knew, who might tell her of Dave. Thus far, all had gone well, but after the carriage passed them, along came a buggy with a single driver and a single mule. It was Dave's mule, and the driver was Sim Arlington.

"Yondah be Sim, an' he hev Dave's mule. I'm goin' to run an' ask 'im whar is Dave at." And Lury sprang away from them, as fleet as a deer, scrambling through the brush straight up the steep hillside to the nearest point at which she might gain the road.

"There! Now it's come. We ought to have told her ourselves, and not let it fall on her like this," said Bob.

As they followed the path, they lost sight of her, and a moment later they saw her standing beside the buggy, looking up in the driver's face. They could not hear the conversation, but a few moments after they heard Sim laugh, and then her laugh came down to them, happy and carefree.

"Glory! He's not going to tell her," cried Peg. Then Lury came back and called to her:

"Sim say he done come fer me to ride weth 'im. He

say Dave hain't usin' the mule, so he took 'im. Ef — ef — you-uns don't keer, I guess I'll go, fer hit'll sarve Dave right, stayin' 'way like he do, when he tol' me he shore would come an' take me to 'preachin'.'"

"All right — if you want to — but you'll find us again, will you?"

"Oh, yas'm. We'll go on an' git Honey-Son. We'll see you-all at Gower's at the church."

"Well, did you ever see anything like that? There goes my little Paris outing dress climbing into the buggy with that mountain man."

"You're going to have your hands full with her," said Bob with glee.

"Oh, no, I shan't. She's perfectly natural, that's all. Dave has failed her, as she supposes, poor fellow, and she is not going to let people know she cares. Why, the most sophisticated girl on earth would do that."

"I believe you," said Barney. Had he not had evidence of it?

Lury had not far to ride, for they were nearly at the church, and they could hear the quavering lilt of an old-fashioned hymn sifting sweetly down to them through the wooded slope. They followed along the road now and soon arrived at the open glade where fifty or more vehicles were left, the animals "unhooked" and standing about, munching fodder and resting. These were the early ones. Many more were yet to come. By the time they reached the little unpainted building, the sermon had begun, and they slipped quietly in and sat themselves near the open door.

The men were all on one side of the church and the women

and little children on the other. The boys sat on the men's side, with their fathers and big men relatives.

"You ought to sit over on the other side," whispered Peg. "The men are there."

"Oh, this will do. We're near the middle, and the sweethearts all sit near the middle, see, so they can be together."

Honey-Son was with Lury, and Sim sat just across the aisle from them. Jenny Deal sat behind them with her mother, and her father had gone up in front with the elderly members of importance. Jenny did not look contented, and she kept her eyes on Lury and glanced from time to time at Sim. She did not understand the situation. Sim, she had fondly hoped, was to have called for her that Sunday, but he had not done so. He had not said he would, but he had acted last time as if he were going to do so. At any rate, she had had hopes, and now her hopes were sinking as she saw his shy, awkward regard of Lury.

Before them, leaning over the little, high pulpit, his large, lean hands gripping it on either side, and his elbows raised to a level with his wide, square shoulders, making one long, straight line from elbow to elbow, with his head dropped and chin thrust forward until it also was on the level with his shoulders and elbows, stood the preacher. His short, thick, wiry, gray hair stood on end, as if it had risen in horror at the pictures of human woe and the punishments for sin that filled the head it covered.

"My bretheren and sisters, you young men and you young women, you sit thar in yore seats, at ease with yoreselves, and fittin' the coats I be measurin' off to ye on yore neighbors. Rise up an' put 'em on yore own backs an' see how they fit ye. I tell ye thar be backbiters amongst

ye. Thar be swearers amongst ye. Thar be liars amongst ye. Thar be them amongst ye what cain't go f'om one day to th' next 'thout yer drink o' corn licker, an' I tell ye, thar be no place fer the drunkard in the kingdom of heaven. He be worse'n th' hogs what feeds on the sour slop what ye th'ows out to 'em, fer the hogs therselves won't drink the devil's brew ye makes f'om hit.

"Thar be swearers amongst ye. What says the good book? 'Ye have blasphemed My holy name.' An' what be the meanin' o' that? Hit mean takin' the name o' God on yer lips in vain, when ye hain't no need fer takin' hit; when yer hearts be full o' the devil's thoughts; when ye hain't no mo' consarn fer holy things an' no mo' keer fer sich 'n ye have fer good food, when ye've filled yerselves plumb full o' licker. When ye be like the Prodigal Son as is told about in holy writ, what filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat and wallered weth th' hogs as he et weth. I tell ye thar be a place prepared fer sich; an' thet place hain't in the kingdom o' heaven; no, my bretheren an' sisters, hit be the place prepared fer the devil an' his angels down in th' lowest pit o' hell. 'An' thar shall be wailin' an' gnashin' o' teeth.'

"The good book says: 'Woe be to the man who putteth the bottle to his neighbor's lips.' I tell ye the' be no diff'ence whether hit be a bottle 'er a stone jug. They be no diff'ence whether hit be in goblets o' gold 'er a tin cup; they be death in the cup; they be th' coiled-up sarpent o' destruction, an' a rattler'd be less pizen. Fer all ye takes hit fer th' bite o' a rattler, hit be fer th' reason 'at the deadliest draft be th' onliest thing to meet hit weth. Yet they be them amongst ye, — put this 'er coat on an' see how hit

fits, — they be them amongst ye 'at fills his neighbor plumb full o' licker, an' takes money fer sich, an' places a stumbling block in the way of leetle childern; an' thar the good book say: 'Woe be to him by whom the offense cometh, it were better fer 'im if a millstone were hanged about his neck an' he were cast in the depths o' th' sea.'

"Thar be the swearer an' the drunkard, an' the man what puts th' bottle to his neighbor's lips; whar be they goin', my bretheren? They be goin' along thet smooth an' easy path — tromped smooth by a many feet, 'at leads to destruction, 'at leads straight to the bottomless pit o' hell, an' 'Thar shall be wailin' an' gnashin' o' teeth.'

"They be them amongst ye thet backbites and lies on the'r neighbor. Now who be th' chief o' all liars? He be th' devil, and they be no place fer them as sarves th' devil but thet place prepared fer the devil an' his angels. The' be no place fer sich in th' kingdom o' heaven. Why, my bretheren an' sisters, ef ye sniff fer hit, ye c'n smell the brimstun in the very gyarments a'ready, o' them as knowin'ly takes away his neighbor's good name, an' he don't alluz do hit in so many words, neither. He may do hit by hol'n his mouth shet, 'er he may do hit weth a laugh, 'er by turnin' his back, 'er by jes' flingin' out his han' 'er shakin' his head. He thet taketh away his neighbor's good name be a murderer an' a liar, and the chief o' sinners an' the mouth o' hell is yawnin' fer 'im, and th' devils own angels are a-reachin' out ther han's to draw 'im in."

His face was thin and mobile, and his eyes were so blue that they seemed to scatter blue rays, as he stretched out his head and looked keenly here and there over his audience. The wrinkles at their corners were deep, and their blueness

was intensified by the dark tan of his weatherbeaten skin. The expression playing about his large, well-shaped mouth and massive chin conveyed continually greater and more powerful meaning to the words he uttered, and as he paused now and again after some impassioned invective, it seemed to his listeners in the rear that if he said nothing but just stood before them and looked his thoughts, he would be quite clear and eloquent.

"But," thought Peg, "how terrible for these people to have nothing to make them good but the fear of such a hell!" She whispered this to Barney, and he bent his head close to her flushed face to hear.

"He knows what these people need," he said, his eyes smiling into hers, and she felt comforted.

"You-all come here, twicet a month. You come here an' set an' listen to prayer, an' sing yer holy songs, an' ye like to hear me preach to ye abouts the kingdom o' heaven, an' ye think you-all be goin' thar fer bein' thet good as to come to preachin' reg'lar. Smooth as honey an' cream the good words roll from yer lips, but I tell you I've been about some, an' I know what-all be in yer midst, and I'm preachin' hell fire this day, an' ef the Lord wills, I'm givin' hit to ye, too.

"You-all knows the Lord's prayer, er ye ought to ef ye don't, an' you-all prays thet prayer, 'thout stoppin' to think what ye sayin'. 'Our father who art in heaven —' Be ye sons o' God er childern o' th' devil? 'Hallowed be thy name.' Be ye hallowin' the name o' Gawd when ye take hit on yer lips to cuss weth? 'Thy kingdom come.' Do ye eveh stop to think how many o' ye'll be throw'd out, when Gawd's kingdom come on yearth like hit be in

heaven? Be all you liars an' drunkards and throwers o' stumblin' blocks an' backbiters, what takes away yer neighbor's good name, an' them what covets yer neighbor's goods an' yer neighbor's wife, — be the kingdom o' heaven made up o' adulterers and thieves? Whilst you-uns han's be busy fittin' these er coats I be'n flingin' to ye on each other's backs, jest you stop a minute an' think what-all you sayin' when ye says 'Thy will be done, on yearth as hit be in heaven.' Do ye mean thet? What be th' will o' th' Lord? He hev fixed a gre't gulf betwixt them as git's into heaven an' the place He hev prepared fer sinners an' the devil an' all his angels. Be ye ready to go thar? Weighted down weth sin, like millstones about yer necks? I ask: Be ye ready to say Thy will be done, and Thy kingdom come now? Right now? Be ye ready? All you as be ready, jes' rise thar whar ye be, an' let's hev a look on ye.

"I tell ye, my bretheren, they be them amongst ye right now what think yerse'fs the chief o' sinners 'at be more ready than a heap o' folks 'at thinks they be cl'ar plumb fitten fer th' Lord to appear now in his glory. They be them standin' afar off, weth ther hades dropped, beatin' ther breasts and cryin' 'Lord be merciful to me a sinner.' An' they be more ready 'an a heap o' folks 'at rejoices in ther own righteousness an' shouts Glory be. Ye be all sinners. They be none good, not one, an' they be one path to th' heavenly throne, an' thet path be wet weth the blood shed fer sinners an' filled weth the thorns thet pierced yer Saviour's brow."

The preacher rose to his full height and lifted his hands high above his head, and shouted ecstatically his short

ejaculations. "'The soul thet sinneth it shall die.' It shall die 'er bear the punishment. They be only one path to safety, and hit be the hard an' narrow way. Ef the punishment be more than ye can bear, they be One as bore hit fer ye. They be One as tromped the paths o' this world, an' bore the meanness an' defilement heaped on him by all o' you-uns, an' died on th' cross fer ye, an' descended into hell fer ye; ye no need to go thar now ef ye accept him, fer he hev been thar fer ye; but ye hev to turn f'om yer wickedness an' live. Ye cain't live 'ithout ye turn. Turn, my fellow sinners, turn. Lift up yer eyes unto the hills f'om whence cometh yer light — the holy hills whar sits the Lord in glory, an' turn yer backs on yer sins; and hell, an' the devil, an' all his angels may howl afteh ye to the very gates of heaven, but ef yer feet be trompin' thet narrow way they cain't one on 'em come nigh ye. Let us pray."

Preacher Price dropped on his knees, and the people before him swayed and rocked under the lash of his impassioned prayer, beseeching the mercy of God for them. Some wept and called "Amen." Some groaned, and bowed their heads and covered their faces with their hands, while some sat apathetically looking on, and speculated as to who among them all had really been "convicted of sin."

Good old John Arlington was one who sat with streaming tears and covered face. "No drunkard shall enter the kingdom of heaven," he wheezed. His good wife crossed over to the men's side and sat close to him and patted his back affectionately.

"Ye hev be'n a drunkard, but ye hev be'n in the fold. Ye hev backslid, John, but glory be! yer back in the fold

agin, John, glory be! Rise up an' go to th' mo'ner's bench whilst he be a-prayin'. He be a-prayin' fer ye, John, glory be!"

So John rose and went, and knelt where he had been many times before, for his life was made up of periodic backslidings and reconversions, followed by days of ecstatic emotion and happiness, when he often prayed for death before he should backslide again.

During the whole sermon Peg had noticed a woman seated not far from her, thin and dark, heavy of countenance, having a great knot of coarse, black, unkempt hair beneath her black hat, which set far over her face and was decorated with cheap black ribbon and a huge black rose. Her black eyes roved continually about the church, shifting and watchful. They rested often on Lury and her little brother, who was sleeping with his head thrown back on his sister's arm. Again they rested on Sim Arlington and then on Jenny Deal. She seemed to be taking in everything but the sermon, and certainly she was not intent on fitting herself with any one of the coats flung out by the preacher.

When Peg lifted her head after the long prayer was done, the woman was no longer there. Lury also was gone, and Sim Arlington was quietly tiptoeing out. Jenny Deal still sat beside her mother, looking straight before her.

CHAPTER XXIV

LURY LEARNS ABOUT DAVE

A LITTLE distance from the church, among the trees, the animals were tethered, contentedly eating and drowsing. Families were gathering in groups here and there among the brilliant autumn foliage, setting out their abundant supply of fried chicken and baking-powder biscuit, ham and bacon and boiled eggs, fried pies galore, and a varied assortment of preserves and jellies and pickles, — everything a good housewife could think of to fill her hungry brood and the friends who might eat with them. Married sons and daughters brought their food and their little flock of children to sit with their parents, who often themselves had children no older than their grandchildren, so that a tiny uncle and niece might be seen amicably sharing their corn-bread and molasses, or vigorously snatching away each other's chicken bones.

Lury was making her way toward the carriage which had brought the sisters and Mrs. Basle. Honey-Son was still sleepy, rubbing his eyes and yawning. She had brought him out before the general uprising of the congregation for fear that he might cry when awakened, and she was cajoling him with promises of goodies when they reached the wagon. Peg, keenly interested in everything and every one, was standing with Barney near the door, waiting for the widow to join them, for she was detained within by many friends

and acquaintances, who, always leisurely, made elaborate inquiries after her state of health.

Elizabeth and Caroline were already at the carriage, busily taking out the luncheon. Bob was sauntering around, observing quietly, making his way unobtrusively toward any group that promised more than usual diversion. Their scraps of conversation interested him. Their odd and often whimsical turns of phrasing especially delighted him. He waited a moment, watching some boys, and heard two men behind him drop their tones to a confidential pitch.

"Who's peddlin' fer ye now?"

The reply was still lower and more covered. "We hain't 'lowin' to peddle much. We gin Ellen th' use o' th' mule some."

"What ye 'low'll come to Dave?"

"Th' case'll be called likely next week. I 'low he's boun' to git what's comin' to 'im."

The men moved farther off, and Bob did not follow. Instead, he walked toward the carriage and overtook Lury with her little brother.

"Honey-Son be so cross I had to fetch 'im out," she said, with a glance at Bob, shyly smiling. Sim Arlington was making his way toward her, but as he saw Bob join her, he turned away to the two men and walked with them.

"He's hungry, poor little chap. Let me carry him."

But the baby arms only clung more tightly around his sister so that she moved with difficulty. She stooped to him and stood a moment petting him and coaxing him to be good, when the peevish voice of Ellen Furman caused her to lift a flushed and angry face. Bob had noticed the

woman watching Lury and had wondered at the look of sinister interest in her eyes.

"Thar ye be, spilin' 'im like ye always do. Make 'im leave go an' foller along like he'd ought to."

The child set up a wail in earnest when he spied Ellen, and Lury snatched him in her arms and soothed him. "She shan't tech ye, son, don't ye holler."

Ellen laughed. "Ef I did tech 'im once, he'd l'arn to behave. 'Pears like ye don't think much o' Dave, goin' buggy-rid'n' weth 'nutheh man th' minute ye git shet o' him."

Lury paused, lifted her head high, and turned suddenly upon the woman. "Whar be Dave at?" Her voice was hoarse with suppressed passion. What was Ellen hinting at? She never could say anything straight out, but must always hint and cast insinuations first.

"Whar be he? You knows whar Dave be at. Whar he'd ought to 'a' be'n two y'ar ago. You be cute, seem like, pickin' up Sim Arlin'ton fust thing." A crowd began to collect around them, and Lury turned from one face to another, like a snared creature.

Bob took her by the arm. "Come over to the carriage, Lury. I'll find out for you. Come."

He would have led her away, but Ellen would not be balked of her malicious triumph. She stepped in front of them, and thrusting her sallow face forward close to Lury's, she said: "Askin' whar Dave be at, like ye neveh know'd? I'll tell ye; he be in jail, an' he be thar fer killin', thet's what fer, an' he be thar fer life, 'er fer hangin' one." Then she drew back to mark the effect of her words, but for a moment it seemed as if there were none.

Lury stood motionless, apparently passionless, holding her little brother closer — closer, but silent. Bob thought she was going to fall, as he watched her still face turn white to the lips, and put his arm around her. But she did not fall. Slowly she turned to him.

"Leave go," was all she said, then walked swiftly to the carriage. Bob followed, and Ellen gave vent to a cackling laugh. Peg had seen the interview from a distance, and she and Barney hastened to Lury, while the group that had gathered lagged along in the same direction.

"She be hit right hard," said Sim, who had not allowed himself to be far from her at any time. "I 'lowed I wouldn' tell 'er, but she were boun' to hear."

"Miz Basle," Lury was breathless, and the words could scarcely be heard. "Please, ma'am, will —" she choked and began again louder. "Please, ma'am, will ye be so kind — I got ter — go, will ye keer fer Honey-Son ontwel I git back?"

"Lury, dear, you can't do anything. Where are you going?" Peg took her in her arms and caressed her.

"Yas, Lury, honey," said the widow, "but you cain't do nothin'. I knowed all the time what 'd come to Dave, but we 'lowed to keep hit f'om ye."

"What good would thet do? Git 'im free? Leave me go. Leave me go! I got ter go."

"But whar'll ye go at, child? The's no place fer ye to go."

"Leave me go. I'll come back. Keep keer o' Honey-Son fer me ontwel I come back, will ye, — please, ma'am?" She turned from them resolutely, in spite of all they could say, making no response to their attempts to comfort her, but Barney stopped her.

"Tell us where you are going, Lury; what are you going to do? Maybe we can help you."

"Ye cain't he'p me none. Ellen, she be'n lyin' on Dave, an' I hain't said a word to 'er, for fear I'd cuss, like the preacher said, an' go to torment; but ef cussin' would sen' her thar, I'd do hit an' be glad to go fer doin' hit."

"But it would be better for you to wait and find out just what the charge is. We all stand ready to help you as soon as there is a way. You can't do anything by going to him."

"I hain't a-goin' to him. I be goin' to who kin he'p him." She looked around on them all with pathetic, tearless eyes. Her lips trembled, and she was very pale, but she held herself erect, with lifted head. "You-uns all be right good. Thank ye. I got ter go. Leave me go. Thank ye." Her little brother's hands were tightly clinging to her skirt, but she stooped and unclinched them and thrust him toward the widow. "I'll be back d'rectly, Miz Basle, thank ye."

She swung away with the carriage of an empress, swiftly out of the crowd gathered in the grove, on the edge of which Ellen stood watching her depart, the hat with the black rose tipped forward, her hands on her hips, and her meagre form loosely hung with the clothing she had purloined from Lury's little store.

"She carry herse'f like she trompin' on the hull crowd." Ellen addressed the two men Bob had heard talking a few minutes before. "What in hell she want to be so crazy 'bouts Dave, runnin' to him like she had no shame, an' ev'ybody seein' her do hit, shovin' her leetle brother onto Miz Basle to keer fer. I neveh seen th' like; cain't nobody

manage her no way, — cl'ar spoilt, like thet 'er young 'un she call hern." The three walked over to an old rattletrap of a rig, and Ellen began to unhitch the mule. The two men climbed into the lopsided buggy, allowing her to do the work while they talked and chewed and spat.

Caroline hastily wrapped in paper a few sandwiches and a morsel of cake and thrust them into Bob's hand. "Run and give her this. She hasn't had a bite of luncheon. Tell her to eat it. Poor dear."

"Lury," called Bob, overtaking her, "stop a moment. Mrs. Tabor sends you this and says you must eat it. Listen, don't give up. We'll all stand by you." She lifted her eyes to his as she took the package, but said nothing. "Let me go with you, won't you? It's hard on you, we know."

"Hit's no good you goin' — thank ye — you be right good. Hit hain't me, hit's him. I be all right." She turned from the road and began climbing a hardly defined path up the mountain, and was quickly lost to his sight among the laurel and flaming sumac.

He turned back to the waiting group, who had established themselves beneath a wide-spreading white oak, and sat with them in silence meditating on the strange manner in which this whole episode had worked upon him, to make him feel thus the anguish of the girl, who was only an ignorant mountain child in love with a crude mountain boy whose whole business had been to peddle illicit corn whisky and evade the law of the land.

For some reason Bob's philosophy had never taught him to expect such a phase of emotion in himself. Why should the sight of the girl's anguish stir him thus? He looked

toward the widow and saw the eyes of Honey-Son fixed on him; he began to make grimaces for the child's entertainment and soon had him off in gales of laughter. This created a diversion for all, and the tension lightened. The sermon was talked over, and they debated whether they should stay for the afternoon service. Barney was restless and averse to listening to another sermon. Peg didn't care but would do whatever he would, and they finally wandered away in deep conversation. Bob decided to take a stroll by himself, and shortly thereafter he was missing.

"Now, Mrs. Basle," said Elizabeth kindly, "I know you would like to stay for the afternoon service, and we'll stay with you — if it won't be too much for you, Caroline?"

"If it is, I will let you know, and we can go any time," and so the matter was settled.

Bob thought he knew where Lury was going, and as soon as he was beyond the grove, he took an undignified pace down the hillside, following the trails they had taken in the morning, and soon was at the Settlement. There he got out his little car, examined it carefully, and presently was speeding up the new road toward the mountain top. He could at least try to find her and bring her home. Of course she was nothing to him but a girl in trouble and likely to be in more trouble, and here he was drifting around — in common humanity he should help her.

By late afternoon he had gone as far as he dared, lest he miss Lury altogether. He drove his car to the roadside and started off on the mule trail toward Daniel McEwen's cabin. She had no doubt gone there.

He clambered on at the same eager pace he had taken

down from the church, hardly conscious of the internal dynamo which was driving him thus to action on her behalf, yet pleasurably excited by it. Glancing restlessly about as he walked, he caught sight of a scrap of blue through the bushes at one side. There she lay, face down on a bank of moss and pine needles, and close to her side, with her arm thrown over him, was her dog, which had been shut up in the widow's cabin when they left to keep him from following.

The faithful creature lifted his head and growled when Bob approached them, but her arm tightened around him, and he lay still. She was worn out with her exertion and grief. Bob would not wake her, but seated himself some little distance away, to wait. The dog subsided and stretched his nose close to her neck, but kept one eyelid lifted a bit to watch Bob's movements. So for an hour they remained, Bob stretched on his back, his hands beneath his head, his eyes on the sky, and his mind busy with the problem of life, so unsolvable and mysterious.

Then Lury sat up and clasped her arms around the dog and looked off over the valley below them. "God, God A'mighty," she moaned. "I hain't a-cussin', I be prayin', God. I hev cussed. I be'n driv to hit. You knows how I be'n driv. An' Dave, he be'n puttin' the bottle to his neighbor's lips, like the preacher done say. Gawd A'-mighty, don't 'low 'im be hung, fer he neveh done no killin'. He done put the bottle to his neighbor's lips, but he neveh didn' kill nobody. He say he would, but you knows he neveh. Be ye hurt 'n' we-uns fer cussin' an' lyin' an' drinkin' an' sich? Be ye, Gawd? We be'n awful bad, but we hain't goin' to be so no mo'. Gawd A'mighty, he'p

Dave out. Don't 'low 'im be hung. He'p 'im out." She dropped her head and covered her face, and her whole body shook with silent sobs.

Bob could stand it no longer. He rose and came to her. The dog gave a low, sullen growl, and Lury started and turned frightened eyes upon him. Instantly her expression changed to one almost of gladness.

"Haish, Clip. Lie down. Good dog," she said, and rose, holding out both hands to Bob. "You be that good to come."

What could he do? He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her and comfort her as he would Peg, — this mountain waif, so strangely simple and beautiful, with her flushed face, and her scarlet lips, curved and quivering, and her eyes pleading with him.

"I've come to help you, little Lury," he said gently and took her hands in his. "Come home with me now."

"I'll go back. Ye be good." They stood a moment, hands clinging to hands, and eyes to eyes. Bob thrilled to her beauty, and he knew it, but she understood only her sorrow and the help he brought her, and that he would take her back to Mrs. Basle, now she was too weary to walk farther, and that maybe he could find Daniel McEwen for her.

He took her to the car, his arm gently supporting her. "What might she not be in a year's time, with those sisters," his thoughts ran. Why should he leave her to the rough mercy of mountain folk? Why, indeed?

"Please, mount Clip ride, too? He be'n follerin' me up the mountain, an' he's hurted he's foot some way." Surely the poor dog was limping.

"Of course he may ride, if he will." Bob placed her in the seat at his side, and the dog leaped in and sat close to her feet, his head between her knees.

In silence Bob began to descend the mountain far more slowly than he had come. Presently she turned and looked at him. "Ye be good," was all she said.

"Oh, no, not so very, Lury. What did you come here for? Didn't you know Mr. McEwen was not there?"

"No. Ev'ythin' were locked up, an' Josephine gone, an' the chick'ns gone, an' the well bucket all dry an' fallin' to pieces, settin' on the curb. I filled hit weth wateh an' lef' hit thar, leakin'."

He wished to divert her, as the only thing he could do to lighten her grief for the moment, so he asked who Josephine was, and laughed on being told she was the cow.

"She were a right good cow," said Lury, seeing no cause for laughter.

"I haven't a doubt of it. Do you go to preaching often?"

"I goes a heap — when I c'n git to go. I has to start right early, weth Honey-Son draggin' back on me."

"Of course."

"An' when he were leetle, I didn' go at all, an' Ellen say I were plumb heathen."

"Was she the woman who came up there and told you you had spoiled your little brother?"

"Yas, 'n' she know 'bout 's much how to bring up chil'en as — as — she don't know as much as Clip here. This er dawg know a heap mo' 'n she do. An' when I do go to church, I don't set thar chawin' on a tooth-brush."

"Was she chewing a tooth-brush? That was a queer thing to chew."

"That 'er stick what she dip snuff weth. She chaw on thet th' hull day long."

"Did you live with her? Was she the one who gave your little brother that drug?"

"She were — an' I'll hev her indicted fer hit, too. I didn' live weth her; she live weth me."

"Oh!" said Bob. He was being enlightened. "And does she go to preaching often?"

"She go to ev'y preachin' she kin. Here an' yon' she go. She alluz quar'l'n' 'bouts hit, too. She say I be shore goin' to hell, fer why I neveh be'n dipped cl'ar undeh. She say my maw thar too, fer why she were on'y sprinkled. My maw were Methodis'. She say my maw a-ha'nt'n' 'roun' yit, 'cause she neveh were right baptized, a-honin' fer to git to heaven. I reckon ef Ellen goin' to heaven fer bein' dipped like she say, I'd a heap rutheh go 'long weth my maw."

"You mustn't mind what she says. She knows nothing about it."

"She say a heap mo'."

"What else does she say?" Bob found Ellen's theology entertaining and serving a good purpose in keeping Lury's thoughts from her trouble.

"She say Dave shore goin' down fas' as he kin jump to hell, fer why he neveh go to preachin' ner neveh were sprinkled ner dipped ner nothin'. She say he got ter git convarted an' wrastle fer marcy, er go to hell one. She say she wrastled fer marcy fer a hull week, an' got convarted, an' were dipped, an' she be cl'ar plumb saved, an' don't hev to do nothin' mo' — jes' on'y set. She settin' thar drunk mo'n half the time, too. Preacher say them as does

thet, cain't git in heaven. What-all do preacher mean by 'vain'?"

"By 'vain'? — why — there is more than one meaning to that."

"Ef ye takes Gawd's name in vain; how kin ye take hit?"

"Oh. That means you must not use the name of God needlessly. You may use it in praying or in speaking about God, when you have to, but you must not — you must —"

"An' ye cain't cuss weth hit?"

"No. That's very bad."

"Wall, ye cain't cuss wethout hit, kin ye? Miz Basle say ef I go to preachin' to-day weth you-uns, I got ter quit cussin'. She say right folks don' do sich es thet. I don't guess she thought I'd see Ellen thar. Ef I takes the name o' Gawd, an' axes Him in prayin' to sen' Ellen straight to hell, ye reckon He'd do hit? Would thet be vain?"

"Oh, Lury, that is no way to do. How do you know there is such a hell? How would you like it if Ellen should ask God to send you there, or — well —" Bob searched through his stock of philosophic lore, but found there nothing which would help Lury or solve her difficulties.

"I reckon she hev. She be so plumb shore I be goin' thar, an' Dave, too. She hev tol' on him 'at he done kill my paw. He neveh. He say a heap o' times he will kill 'im, but he neveh, — fer he were off sellin'. Hit were th' officer done hit, er Jim, one. She know hit, too." Lury suddenly clapped her hand over her mouth.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I were goin' to cuss. Oh, Gawd, I were goin' to cuss. I has to cuss, fer ther hain't nothin' else I kin do."

"Don't do it, Lury. Try to think better thoughts.

Why do you say it was Jim who shot your father? Who is Jim?"

"Jim? He be kin to my paw. He be Ellen's ol' man. Ellen an' paw, they uset to pester Jim somethin' awful. Paw, he'd gin Ellen licker, an' Jim, he'd cuss, like they do at th' Cove, an' paw an' Ellen they'd set an' laugh at Jim, ontwel he were like to go blind ragin'. They were awful bad."

Bob turned and looked with wonder at the girl. He could not reconcile the strange, almost spiritual beauty of her face and her gentle voice with the terrible things she was telling him, and with the life she must have led in that degraded home. How did this flower ever happen to blossom in such a place? His thought reverted to the mother.

"And then what did your mother used to do?"

"Maw jes' set still. Gawd! How still she set —! An' she look off to the top o' Ol' Abe mountain, like she get he'p thar. An' sometimes she take me by th' han', an' we'd walk far up on th' mountain an' set — waitin' — I hev set thar weth her — all night we hev set out thar, an' them in the cabin howlin', plumb full o' licker. Then in th' mawnin' we'd go back, an' they'd be cl'ar played out, an' maw, she'd make coffee and git ther breakfast, an' paw cussin' at 'er. Them times Dave tell paw quit, er he'd kill 'im. Dave he neveh drunk, fer he done gin maw his promise. He were mos' times down mountain sellin', er else he'd come an' set weth us, er lie down by th' still an' sleep."

"What became of the money they got for their liquor?"

"Paw an' Jim, they'd divide hit, an' then they'd hide

hit some'er's. Ellen, she be'n wil' to fin' ther money. I seen 'er lookin' eve'y whar she kin think fer hit. All 'bouts th' chimley, — but she neveh know'd whar hit were, nor ther licker, neitheh. They has a heap, Dave say. Cain't nobody in th' worl' fin' hit, an' they neveh tell Ellen nothin', for they cain't trust her fer nothin.' She jes' honin' fer hit, an' she try a heap o' times to make me search fer hit, but maw say she betteh leave all sich be, fer hit be devil's money, an' ef she fin' hit, destruction'd foller her cl'ar to hell."

"Your mother must have been a remarkable woman."

"She were good, ef she were neveh dipped."

It was dusk when Bob brought the car to a standstill by the school, yet light enough to see the buggy of Sim Arlington drawing up to the Deals', and Jenny alighting from it. They heard her happy voice asking him to "come in and set."

CHAPTER XXV

DAVE'S LETTER

DAVID TURPIN'S case was called at the autumn term of the court, but his defense could not prove an alibi. The whole Settlement knew that he had hurried up the mountain and left his mules in Ross's stable while he went on toward the Cove, and that the next day Lee Bab was found lying dead beside his own door.

Many of them had heard his foolish, boyish boast that if Lee Bab didn't "quit some of his meanness" he would shoot him, and that "hangin' would be too good for him." Poor little Lury was placed on the witness stand and bravely lied for him, saying she had no interest in him, had always hated him, and that if she could say that he had done this, it would be no more than he deserved, but that he was not seen by her until after the "buryin'", that he had gone the day before on a four-days' trip, and much more, to the effect that she would not lie for him if she could, even to save her own soul, but that he was down the mountain at the time "er likely he mount 'a' done hit." All this was told in laconic replies to repeated questions, and unless the questions could be answered as she chose, her replies were innocently vague and uninforming.

The woman who had bought blue calico and molasses at the store and had seen Dave drive up that evening as she walked away with her purchases, gave damaging testi-

mony against him. Others there were who desired to have an example made of some of the law-breakers at the Cove, and for the sake of order in the community, brought their influence to bear against Dave. Nothing could be proved, yet the circumstantial evidence was too strong to be set one side; he was given a life sentence, and the prison doors closed behind him.

"Ef on'y they won't hang Dave," sobbed poor Lury, and when she learned it was to be a life sentence instead, she lifted her head and laughed. "I kin do a heap fer Dave, ef they leave 'im live," she told Peg.

Some one bought Dave's mules, she did not know who, — and the money was placed to his account in the Woodville bank. Lury saved the little tobacco bag of bills Dave had sent her, never spending a cent more, and worked faithfully at the school for her board and tuition, and a very small wage, which kept her little brother, for she would not accept charity.

"I hain't pore," she explained to Elizabeth one day. "Ev'ythin' thar at th' Cove be mine, ef I'd go thar fer hit, but I'm feared to go thar, lest I do somethin' worse 'n eveh I done — fer seem like I'd tear Ellen Furman's heart out ef I met up weth 'er. I hain't cussin' no mo', but I does a heap o' studyin' 'bouts gittin' even weth 'er 'thout git'n' whar Dave be at."

Down in Woodville one day, Bob Kitchel met Daniel McEwen at the home of the banker. He had been away from his hilltop long enough, he said, and he "reckoned Gov'nment wouldn't miss him, not so's to notice it much."

He appeared to know nothing of matters at the Settlement and asked many questions, and it was from Bob, so

Bob thought, that he first learned of the trouble which had befallen Dave, and what had become of Lury.

"And th' trial's gone agin 'im?"

"Quite. It's a good thing for the girl, but hard on him."

"I reckon so, both ways, yas."

"If he hadn't been arrested, of course, he would have married her. Now he can't, and she will have a chance to be educated and develop — and — it may lead to her occupying a place in life where she would be well cared for and do a lot of good, you know, — while if she were to marry now, it might lead to the very life her mother led."

"You reckon what thet mount 'a' been?"

"From what she told me, I should think anything that would save her from such a life would be a Godsend to her. She does not seem to know what a waste her mother's life must have been, but after she has spent a year in that school, she will know more about it. She will know what her mother must have suffered, at any rate."

"You reckon hit would be good fer her to know thet?"

"Why, it would keep her from falling into the same fate, — the same kind of a life, — or trusting herself to a young reprobate like Dave Turpin."

"An' what kind of a life you reckon she'd be good fer?"

"Why, with a good education, she might become the wife of a man who could give her all in the world to make her happy. She has a rare quality. I never saw a girl for whom nature alone has done so much, or the worst kind of environment has hurt so little." Bob looked away meditatively, and Daniel looked at Bob, also meditatively

"I reckon hit be so. Women has to git to be th' wife of a man pretty gin'lly, to git anywhar therselves, an' hit be a

right hard thing fer 'em to git the right man sometimes, an' then ther be a contrairy sorter streak in 'em what makes 'em clar plumb sot on th' wrong one. I hev knowed of sich. They'll stick up fer some low-down, oncivil, or'nery cuss, stan' by an' do fer 'em, ontwel they drap into ther grave an' neveh let on nothin'. Women is quare."

Richard Hadley came in, and the conversation changed, but still clung to mountain topics. What the sisters had done with their school, and the changes Peg had wrought with her individual help and her money, and the number of girls there now, and what the education was likely to do for them. There again came up the question as to who they could marry, after all was done, and they were back again in their old environment.

"Half of them go back and live in the same old way, merely existing and having a brood of ill-fed, unwashed children hanging about. Whew! I have seen such hopeless homes," said Richard Hadley.

"Leastways, th' be the other half, an' thet's mo'n they is now. Time has been I thought mount's well leave 'em be; but now I reckon we'll have a call to thank them sisters, or the mountain will hev, some day."

"I count a great deal on ancestry," said the banker. "If we only knew how to choose and pick the ones with good ancestry and help them —"

"An' hit be some mixed, here on th' mountain, don't ye guess?"

"Of course," said the wise Bob. "Take a girl like this Lury, with such an inheritance as she must have had from her mother, and then such a boy as the one lying in jail for murder, and let them marry —"

"An' yit, hit be right thar. I hev hearn her paw weren't much fer quality, an' ye were sayin' she hed thet."

There was a minute of silence, and then Bob Kitchel bade them all good-by. He was off on a long trip, perhaps to the other side of the world. How long would he be gone? Possibly a year — possibly longer. Perhaps it would depend on when Peg or Barney sent for him to be best man at their wedding; and that might be soon or late.

"Watch Peg, and you'll know when to expect me," he said.

But Peg was not one to be easily watched. The banker had the best means of knowing what she was doing and where she was, for he held her purse strings. Certainly she was in earnest in her decision to make the sisters' school a center of good to the young girls on the mountain, and in so doing, Peg was the happiest girl of them all. It was her delight to watch them unfold, particularly Lury.

Peg was troubled that Lury was so silent and understood so little how to associate with other girls, and to throw off care and be simply a girl with them. They were all mountain girls, and there seemed to be no reason why Lury should hold herself aloof, or be in the least shy with them. Her devotion to her little brother remained unchanged, and the only smiles she had to bestow were for him. He was growing fat and exceedingly comely, and all her spare time, which was but little, was spent in sewing for him and in making her own clothing. This she did at the cabin of the widow. She seemed to prefer to isolate herself thus from the rest of the school.

She preferred to earn her tuition and would not accept the scholarship offered her by Peg.

"They be them 'at needs hit. I be right well fixed," she would say.

"But you don't have the time you should have for study."

"I gits my lessons."

"I know you do. You do well. You ought to have a little time for play, though, Lury."

"I be growed, thank ye. Ye be right good. I has my leetle brotheh. I no need to play. Sich es thet be fer chil'en."

"Oh, Lury! If you only knew what a child you are! Every one needs happiness and sport. Don't you like to watch the girls in the gymnasium? Isn't it fun?"

"I reckon hit be — fer them as likes hit. I has to keer fer — Danny." She loved to call him by that name these days, where there were none to say an unkind word to her. "I has to put by fer him. He got ter hev schoolin'."

So that was it. She was laying by her little wage for the brother. Was it for that? Or was she thinking that sometime Dave would be set free? She never mentioned Dave nor her past life. Her lovely, curved lips were beginning to take on an inflexible expression, and the sisters did not like to see it. Her body was rounding out in the most graceful, delicate curves and lines, and her movements were easy and quiet, yet often swift, like those of some wild, untrammeled creature.

Watching her one day, Peg thought of something she hoped might waken her out of the dream in which she seemed to be living. "How would you like to learn to ride, Lury? Did you ever ride a horse?"

"Naw'm, not a horse." Instantly warm lights danced

in Lury's eyes. "I uset to ride Sam. He were the mule. He kicked, but I could ride 'im. He be my mule by rights, but I see Ellen Furman drive 'im down to th' Settlement ev'y week. What fer she do hit fer, I cain't make out. Likely she sellin' fer 'em."

"What could she sell? Is she selling their whisky?"

"I reckon so. Sim Arlin'ton, he tol' Jenny Deal he quit sellin' fer 'em. Sim, he's took to drinkin' awful bad, she say." It was so rare a thing for Lury to mention Ellen these days that Peg was surprised.

She wished she could know what was in the girl's mind. She wished her school to be a charity, and only allowed a tuition to be paid because, in the judgment of Caroline and Elizabeth, it was part of the girls' education to pay something, if only a mite. "Money plays a large part in the world, and they must not be allowed to have things that cost somebody money, without learning its value." "Things must not come too easy in this world, either, or they are not valued," they would say. So each girl was allowed to pay a little or do something for what she received.

It was very hard for Peg to be judicious. She wished to do more and more for them. All had been done expeditiously and well thus far, — a few dormitories and a gymnasium, a good kitchen and dining-room were built. The room provided by the sisters in the first place had been ample for school room, with the addition of verandas, where the girls did most of their studying. Two instructors had been added to help the sisters, as Peg had insisted in the beginning, but she wished more out-of-door interests for them.

"I'm going to have the girls learn to garden," she announced. "Did you ever make garden, Lury?"

"Naw'm."

"And you did not say if you would like to learn to ride."

"Yas'm. I kin ride. Rid'n' mule be right like rid'n' horse, I reckon."

"Of course. Well, would you like it? That's the question."

"Yas'm, I'd like hit right well."

Peg knew by the light in her eyes that she would. "I'm going to have a stable and some horses. Then you can ride."

Then Lury for the first time offered a remark of her own, which gave Peg a hint of the direction of her thoughts.

"I seen Dan'l M'Cune rid'n' by here on Bess," she said.

"Oh, did you? Is that the name of his black mule?"

"I reckon he come home now. I has a letter Dave writ me."

"You have?" Peg was astounded. For six months they had not heard Lury mention Dave's name. "Was — was he well?"

Lury sat down and drew the letter from the bosom of her dress. She would not allow it out of her hand and held it unopened, but looked at it with loving pride.

"Dave, he hev be'n l'arnin' a heap. He hev writ this hisse'f, an' I kin read hit myse'f. What be 's'preme co't', please, ma'am?"

"Supreme Court, I think it is. It means a higher court than the first one where he had his trial. What does the letter say about it?"

"Hit say somebody hev took his case to s'preme co't, an' he mount git free, 'er hit mount go worse weth 'im, an' he mount git sentence fer hangin', stidier life." Then

Lury broke down and wept. Before this, her eyes had been hard and her manner reserved, but now she let Peg take her in her arms and comfort her.

"Do you care so much for Dave, Lury?"

"Yas'm. He be all I hev, but Honey Son."

"Did he say how he got the chance to learn to write?"

"He say hit were fer good actin'. Dave be awful good. They sure must be a hell fer them as put Dave thar. Mr. Kitchel say mebby the' be no sich place, but preacher Price say the' sure be. A lady she sont books, an' one o' the men be'n he'pin' 'im." Now Lury opened her letter and smoothed the two short pages lovingly, and placed it in Peg's hand. "You kin read hit. I be awful skeered he'll be gin a hangin' sentence, an' I be'n up to Dan'l M'Cune's place. Twicet I be'n thar, oncet when we were to the preachin' and oncet when I were gone all day, an' Miss Elizabeth say as how I cain't go no more fer bein' so long gone. I couldn't go thar an' back no quicker."

"Why do you keep things to yourself so much, Lury? We might help you often, if you would tell us what you want. We knew he was not at home, and we could have found out if he had come back, and you would have been saved all that long climb and the disappointment."

"I cain't tell ye. Maw, she l'arnt me to keep my mouth shet."

"What is it you would like of Mr. McEwen?"

"I want him to git Dave out an' tell 'em he neveh done hit, er I want him to stop 'em f'm takin' his case to the s'preme co't, fer I'd a heap rutheh he'd be in prison 'an I'd hev him hung."

"Of course you would, Lury."

Peg read the letter slowly through, sitting there with her arm around the weeping girl.

"Deer lury say i hev larnt writn an rit this mysef fer good actn is a lady she gin me books an a man hear he heps me reed in the books. A man hear reed avy thin i rite an he ul reed evy thin yu rite. Rite me soon i kin reed hit. Say lury som one hev took My kase to spreem cote an hit May be worst an hit wer ef they gin me hangin verdik nex time, I Don kno who done hit i a heep rutheh be like i be, fer good actn i can git out Som day may bee but ef they change to Hangin i kant. Say lury Bee good an larn good whilst yu be weth them good foks fer i ul Come fer yu the minit i git out fer gawd no i nuva kilt no one an i ul do fer yu like yud ought to bee don fer So i say no more fer i luv yu an think a heap on yu all the time an hop yu ar the same an think on me so Good by dave Turpin."

"That's a good letter, Lury. Don't cry so. You are doing as he says, and if he has another trial, he may be set free. Think of that. In the meantime he is learning as he never would have if he had not been arrested, and you are doing well and becoming a fine woman. If he is innocent, he will be set free. It must be so."

"I cain't he'p cryin', fer he have been puttin' the bottle to his neighbor's lips, like the preacher say, an' Gawd be punishin' 'im fer hit, an' he hev say heap o' times 'at he will kill Lee Bab, an' he done come back thet night, an' he mount o' done hit. Oh, Gawd, he mount. I don't know where he went when he lef' me thet night. I jes' had to stan' up thar an' lie fer 'im. I lied fer all I were wuth, but now I'm skeered they know I were lyin' an' thet may be

fer why they hev took hit to s'preem cote fer to git hangin' verdic' on him. Hit mount be them Furmans done hit, fer they hev a heap o' money hid away. They c'n pay ther witnesses an' git hit bad on 'im, an' they be skeered I'll git back on Ellen fer dosein' Honey-Son nigh to death. Ev'y sence Mr. O'Harrow done cl'ard out all sich f'om Ross's store, an' show'd up that bottle he done got, what Dave took out f'om the fiehplace, she hev been nigh skeered to death."

"I see. Well, I'll fight that out for you and for Dave. I wouldn't be afraid, if I were you. Don't you believe he is innocent, Lury? I thought you did, of all people."

"I do. But he mount 'a' done hit. He hev cussed paw out, an' swore he would kill 'im, an' he mount — ef he seen maw lyin' thar like I seed 'er. I would 'a' done hit myse'f. I be th' child o' the devil, an' full o' sin, an' I cain't git cl'ar, fer Dave, he cain't git cl'ar 'thout I lie fer 'im, an' I cain't pray to Gawd, fer my heart be full o' cussin' gin Ellen, an' I lie all night an' try to pray. But thar I see preacher Price leanin' oveh thet pulpit, lookin' at me, an' I hear 'im say hell be gapin' fer me an' Dave, fer what we done, an' the devil an' all his angels reachin' out ther arms to draw us in, an' I cain't stop. Dave, he mount stop, fer he be whar he cain't do no mo' badness, but not me. I be driv. Gawd know I be driv."

"Lury, dear, there is a way out for both of you, I know there is, but I am not wise enough to show it to you. We'll go talk to Aunt Elizabeth. I'd back her against preacher Price any day, for knowing what is right. She has been a missionary, you know."

So the problem was taken to Elizabeth Graves to be

solved, as many another was, and she had help for Lury, giving her the sweet solace that had been the mainspring of her own life, — absolute faith in the love of Christ and the mercy of God.

Barney O'Harrow had indeed cleaned the poisonous drugs out of Compton Ross's store, and the man was well frightened lest the fact be made public. It was cleverly managed by Barney, and Comp Ross was given the chance to do it himself, quietly, and make a virtue of so doing, while the real threat was carried over his head to the makers of the drugs. At the same time Ellen had been called upon to defend herself for what she had done, and emerged from the interview with the inspectors, pallid with terror. So the matter rested, as Barney recognized the fact that it was next to impossible to punish her in any other way than through her fears of being arrested for attempted murder. That she was culpable and had done it purposely, he had not the slightest doubt, and for that very reason she was the more easily frightened. Thus were they able to hold her own terrible weapon of fear over her own head.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE VERDICT

Days, weeks, and at last months passed. Dave lay in jail in Raleigh, silent, well-behaved, gentle, and innocent of manner, like a hurt creature submitting to fate; and no one who did not know his kind would have dreamed that danger lay underneath his childlike demeanor, or that if ever he were released, those who had brought this trouble upon him would be wise to go where he could never find them.

In the spring his case was taken to the Supreme Court, and the money for his defense provided, no one knew why or by whom. It was evident that some one was deeply interested, but David himself was puzzled over it and feared more than he hoped. It might be an enemy, who wished him to have a more severe sentence. He had hoped that his durance might end sometime, but to be put to death for a thing he had never done, — even though he knew well he could have done it, had the conditions been such as to make it seem the thing for him to do, — to suffer thus for the act of some one who was the real criminal, was more than he could think possible.

His life had been spent up to this time in doing his work and evading the law, and quietly serving those to whom he felt himself beholden and for whom he would willingly have laid down his life, had it come to the issue. But the thought

of giving his life for some unknown evil-doer or of being forced to lie year after year in jail, while the real criminal walked free, filled him with a sort of frenzy, which deadened his spirit and left him in a strangely quiescent condition, like a lion waiting for the chance to spring and rend. This lasted all during the trial.

The judge who gave him the life sentence was a good man, who was filled with the idea that the sort of law-breaking for which David was being held must meet with a more decisive and condign punishment than had been administered in the past. He had decided from the first to make an example of this young man, to teach other young men that illicit selling of liquor, and drunken brawls, and setting the law at defiance, by killing and shooting among themselves, no matter for what reason, must be stopped. It happened that the judge of the Supreme Court was a man even more decided to give the severest penalty, and for the same reasons. So, after all the testimony was in, and the jury again found David guilty of murder, wilful and premeditated, this good, conscientious judge, against his own desire and in spite of much pleading with himself for the young man's life, pronounced the death sentence. Then David was led back to his cell. He stumbled as he walked. When he reached the cell, he stretched himself prone on his bed and hid his face and said never a word.

He had done nothing, but the blow had fallen, and he was dumb. So might a wounded animal lie down in his den to die. He did not weep. There was no solace in tears for so deep a hurt. When he went back after the first verdict, he had wept, but then in the distance appeared a nebulous light that might brighten — sometime — and bring him

release. There was Lury — sitting somewhere, thinking of him and waiting for that distant time when the release should come; and there was God. God knew he was innocent of that crime, and would not let him lie there forever. So he could weep, and lift his head and hope again, and listen to the kind people who brought him books and taught him, and made him understand that there was a real right in his suffering for his wrong-doing, even if he had not done the particular thing for which he was ostensibly being punished.

But now that distant, nebulous light of hope was quenched. He had said all he had to say. He had told them he was innocent, and if he had been thoughtful only for himself, his innocence could have been proved, for he might have stayed down in the low-country and allowed them to look after themselves at the Cove. Then he could have proved an alibi. But for Sally Cloud's sake and for Lury's, he had gone back, had hurried to get there that very night, and now —. He could not think out these thoughts coherently, for during all these days of the trial he had suppressed and covered his emotions until he had exhausted his power of feeling. He did not even think any more about Ellen nor waste invectives on her. She was dead to him. Only Lury lived, and only the thought of her filled his mind. If he could prove to her that he did not commit this crime and die with her faith in him still living, he would be comforted.

As he lay thus, gradually the thought of Lury rose supreme, and he lived over again the moment when he had kissed her. She had promised to be his "ol' woman." He stretched out his arms and clutched the mattress on which

he lay. He would be put to death in the electric chair, or hung, he did not know which. He would rather be hung. Then he grew stiff and stupid with the terrible thought, and then again Lury appeared before him, and he could feel her in his arms. She was to have been his "ol' woman"; and she loved him. He wanted to weep now, but he had no tears. They were dried up. Then he ceased to be sorry for himself and grew sorry for her. He wished she might never know what happened, and that she might think he was still to lie in prison.

The key turned in the lock of the cell door, but he heard nothing, and lay still with covered face. Was he asleep? Daniel McEwen quietly entered and bent above him and listened to his breathing. Then he touched him gently on the shoulder.

"Dave," he said very softly.

The boy sat up and stared in his face, still dazed as if he had been dreaming all this horrible thing. He put his hand to his head. Who was this? Dave had seen him before, but not in this dress. He had worn blue jeans and a soft shirt and a kerchief about his neck. He had lived up on the mountain. Dave had thought more than once during this long time that if he could see this man, he might get help, and now — too late — he had come of himself. Thus for a moment they regarded each other, Daniel looking down on the boy, and the boy looking wearily up, with a blank, hopeless stare. At last Dave spoke.

"Howdy." That was all.

"Howdy, Dave?" said Daniel.

Dave sat on the edge of the couch, and Daniel took a stool in front of him. "I reckon I'll set a while." And again

it seemed as if they had no more to say. Dave just stared before him and was silent.

Daniel rose and walked to the little cell window, and felt of the bars, pulling and twisting at them, then returned to his seat. "I come to tell ye a word, Dave. I be'n tryin' to he'p ye, an' in doin' hit, I hev made a right smaht of a mistake." Still Dave stared. "I reckon you didn't think I were interested none, but I were."

"Thank ye." Dave's voice was hoarse, as if he had used it too much, and had shouted all the emotions he had suppressed.

"I took yore case to th' Supreme Court myse'f, an' I 'lowed we could git ye cl'ar; but hit hev gone against us. Now I hev come to tell ye to keep good heart, fer — "

"Thank ye, hit be too late."

"Son, nothin' be too late. Ye be livin' yit?"

Dave nodded. "I reckon."

"Es shore es ye be livin', I'll git ye cl'ar. Hear?"

"I cain' prove nothin'. I hev said all I has to say, an' hit hain't nothin' I kin prove. You cain' prove nothin' yorese'f, fer ye gin me th' mule to go up thar weth, an' ef they hed 'a' know'd thet, they mount 'a' made ye go on witness stan', an' thar ye'd 'a' hed to say 'at I were thar, leastways 'at I said I were goin' thar. Ye were right good to keep out an' say nothin'. Hit be too late."

"Did ye go thar thet night, son?"

"Naw, I seen Lury half-way down mountain, an' she say her maw were dade, an' so I done brung 'er to Miz Basle, an' went back an' slep' in th' shed whar th' mules were at. I didn't go nigh th' house fer fear o' disturbin' somebody, an' thar nobody could say whar I were sleepin' thet night.

Nobody livin' knowed whar I were thet night, an' nobody to sw'ar fer me, on'y Lury, an' she swore to a lie, fer she do keer fer me a heap, an' she hev damned her soul to hell fer me." Dave swallowed back the lump in his throat and drew his sleeve across his dry eyes.

"Son, I'll git ye cl'ar." The positive tone with which this was said broke in upon the youth's hopelessness with assurance, and he looked up in Daniel's eyes.

"Ye reckon ye kin?" A light spread over Dave's face slowly, then faded. "I wisht I could see how. All be agin me. An' — an' — all be true, on'y jes' 'at I didn' do what they say'n' I done. All be true, on'y thet. I hev sold licker. I hev fit agin th' law an' hev lied a heap — an' I reckon I'm gitt'n' what's comin' to me, fer them things. I cain't bide to die fer 'em, fer thar be Lury. I neveh heered as Gawd hev hed a man hung fer cussin', but likely thet be what fer He don' 'low me git cl'ar."

"Son, do ye reckon ye knows what-all the Lord hev in mind fer ye? Ef ye does, ye knows heap mo'n th' angels therselves."

"I don' reckon," said Dave despondently. "But I hev said all I has to say fer myse'f, an' the Lord, He hain't he'ped me none yit, an' thar's Lury. Ef hit were on'y fer her I were boun' to die, I could b'ar hit a heap betteh, but fer low-down Jim Furman, er fer thet hell cat thar, hit be hard."

"Die fer 'em? What ye talkin' bout, son?"

"Somebody done kilt Lee Bab, an' th' be nobody else what mount 'a' hed cause to do hit, 'thout hit mount 'a' be'n one o' th' officers, an' they hev swore they hain't none o' them done nothin', an' if they had done hit, they hadn't

no reason fer 'lowin' me lie here when they were in the rights o' what they done. Th' law wouldn' do nothin' to 'em." Daniel's gentle manner and the hope he held out to the boy had unlocked Dave's heart, in spite of himself, and brought back his mental control. He was now ready to talk, even to argue the case against himself. "Hit must 'a' be'n Jim — likely Jim, er Joe, — on'y he hedn't nothin' agin Lee Bab, much, less'n a quarrel come up, — er hit mount 'a' be'n Ellen. She were strong fer Lee mos' o' th' time, so hit weren't likely her. An' she an' Lee uset to raise hell fer Jim a heap o' times. I reckon hit were Jim done hit, but I wouldn' dar' sw'ar to hit — an' I cain't rightly sw'ar to nothin' on'y jes' I neveh teched Lee Bab, ner fit weth him, an' I cain't sw'ar I wouldn't 'a' done hit, neitheh; fer I would, sometimes, he were thet mean. I tol' him I would, ef he done like he uset to do any more, too. He know thet, an' so he quit. What he done to make Sally drap like she done, I don' know, but ef I hed be'n thar, I would 'a' kilt 'im. An' thet's hu-come I cain't say no more — jes' set thar an' hear 'em charge th' jury to find me guilty fer what-all I neveh done, an' hang me fer hit, too, an' leave who hev done hit go free." Again Dave drew his sleeve across his dry and smarting eyes. Again he swallowed back the lump in his throat and looked about him for a taste of water. "Gawd! Ef I c'd on'y git down on my knees an' drink out'n ol' Rock Creek!" he said, and his head drooped as when Daniel first roused him.

"Son, I hev l'arnt a heap, jes' livin'. An' one thing I hev l'arnt be 'at the law cain't touch eve'y darn thing as ought to be punished. Hit be a righteous thing to put some men out'n th' worl' an' th' law cain' do hit. Hit be fer some one

to do as'd be willin' to stan' fer hit. Who kilt Lee Bab done a good deed, an' th' shan't nobody die fer hit, neitheh. I'll see thet jedge an' git yer sentence put off fer's long's I kin, likely a year. Meantime, we'll git ye cl'ar. Keep up yer heart. L'arn all ye kin, an' some day — these doors'll swing wide open, an' ye'll walk out a free man, an' a heap wiser, better man, fer all what's come to ye here. Th' be good women to he'p ye on, an' ye'll hev books, an' you keep to them here as'll tell ye right ways o' thinkin'. Hit's how a man thinks as makes a man good er bad."

Daniel rose and laid a hand on Dave's shoulder, but Dave sat still.

"Stan' up an' give me yer han' like a man. The thought 'at ye be cl'ar f'om crime'd ought to make ye hol' up yer head. That's all, Dave."

The young man rose and put his hand in the one Daniel held out to him and looked squarely in the older man's eyes.

"Ye be right good," was all he said.

"Thet's right. Hol' up yer head like thet. Ye be a good man, an' the' be —" Daniel swallowed and waited a moment, then continued, "the' be them as'll stan' by ye."

Then Daniel went out, and his lean face was grave and set. He walked in a high-headed, nonchalant manner, but his eyes, dim with tears for the moment, belied his carriage. Yes, Dave should be set free, but it should be accomplished in Daniel's own way, not by bringing the real culprit forward, but by insistence on the innocence of the youth. Why should any one die for the death of a criminal who had been allowed to live too long, as it was?

CHAPTER XXVII

DANIEL'S DILEMMA

DANIEL MCEWEN was as good as his word. He managed to get a promise from the judge that the execution of the sentence pronounced on David be postponed for one year, on the plea that he knew to a certainty who the real culprit was, and that he would make efforts to find him in the meantime. He almost convinced the judge of the young man's innocence by his earnestness. He hinted at dark secrets in the life of Lee Bab that might have produced enemies, who would cunningly select just such a moment as the arrival of the officers and the death of Bab's wife to revenge themselves without detection. Daniel's own dignity of character and his keen wit carried weight, and as soon as this point was gained, he set himself to secure a pardon, or at the very least a new trial on technical grounds.

Now Daniel, although a man in the very prime of life, began to age. His soul was torn and tortured with the thought that an innocent man was lying condemned to death for his own crime. When his duties in Raleigh ceased, he went back to his eyrie, and there he quietly planned and schemed to avert the legitimate action of the law. Every now and then he descended and visited Dave in prison, and satisfied himself that the young man was gaining ground in every way but physically. Then a psychologic complication occurred on which Daniel had not counted. It was the love

and respect which awoke in the heart of the youth toward him. Many a time this fact brought Daniel to the point of confession. Then a feeling that after all, justice did not demand that either of them should die for the killing of the man and that he could yet make up to Dave for all he had borne, caused him to persist in the course he had chosen.

The fact that Dave had no enemies other than the scurrilous crew at the Cove was greatly in his favor, but yet he seemed to have few friends. Barney, who would have been glad to show him kindnesses for Peg's sake, was away most of the time in the Tennessee mountains, on an engineering job which he fondly hoped would bring him a little nearer his sweetheart. It was all very well for her to have gold and to spare, but it was not for him to be anybody's beneficiary. He could not so far lay aside his pride.

Lury could do nothing but sit and wait. In the doing of this, however, she was changing, growing, drinking in and absorbing into her very being, from the atmosphere with which she was now surrounded, the courtesies and amenities of life. All the gracious and sweet growths that make a character delightful and winsome found place in the garden of Lury's nature. All the girls were crude of speech when they entered the school, but they were mostly sweet-voiced and gentle of manner. Still, they were no more grammatical than Lury Bab, and they were as innocent for the most part of all knowledge of books or the world.

The sisters found their code of ethics not so very unlike that of the world, but differently manifested. They put loyalty to their own families and their own people above all else. It would be a shame in a girl not to lie, if that were the surest way to cover the wrong-doing of a father or a

brother or a friend. A friend might be lied for and an enemy be lied against, with impunity. The bland and convincing way in which a sweetheart would be shielded from blame by any convenient excuse was to Peg something appalling. While nearly all of them dipped snuff openly and unashamed, none of them had Lury's fluency of language in the way of "cussin'." Yet they accepted her manner of speech without comment, other than casual, just as she accepted their snuff-dipping as a matter of course, although she did not do it herself. Indeed, of the two habits, they seemed to look upon hers as the most reprehensible, as did she herself.

Peg Kitchel was gloriously happy in all her work, and the problems and difficulties it often presented were met by her financially and by the sisters ethically, in much the same spirit. It was all a work of love for humanity, and Peg's money was being spent in joyful activity. Out-of-door occupations, she came to realize, were the most efficient means of upbuilding and training those girls. Many of them took care of their own little patches of garden and sometimes of the horse they were allowed to ride. Some of them had been used to riding from childhood. They were from the more thrifty class and were the ones on whom the faculty counted for the most marked improvement. As fast as possible, they were called upon to assist in the creating of a school sentiment quietly working against the vulgarities and crudenesses and foolish pride and weak sensitiveness of those undisciplined daughters of the hills.

Their isolation had left them singularly simple, and yet they were as complex and unique with it all as their sophisticated sisters of civilization. The timid were foolishly shrinking and fearing, and the bold were over-bold. The

restraints laid on those who live in cities or even villages had never been laid on them, and the vagaries of each nature sought their own natural outlet. They had grown as the trees and vines and flowers of the hills grow, each seeking its own way out to the sunlight and air and often battling futilely with the forces against them, — reaching out, grasping here and there at good as they saw it, — sometimes finding it, and sometimes clutching only filth and dead leaves.

Peg, herself more untrammeled than most citizens of the world of conventions, was yet often baffled and at a loss to understand and harmonize these strange complexities of character in one and the same individual. She said to Elizabeth once, of Lury Bab: "She is the most fascinating and perplexing creature I ever got hold of. You never can predict what her decisions will be or what her aspirations are. For herself she seems to have no reckoning for the future, and for her little brother, she seems to consider only his future. It is what he is yet to be that absorbs her. And she won't say a thing of what she is yet to be or do. She just seems void of thought along that line."

"Still, she is improving. I have noticed it more of late. She seems to be taking more pains to correct her way of speaking. She corrected herself twice this morning in class, saying 'is no' for 'hain't none.' Carrie said she almost fell off her chair this morning when Lury came back from the garden and said, 'There are no ripe tomatoes yet.' Think of it! That's improvement."

"I have it. I've touched the right note at last," cried Peg, with glee. "I told her the other day she was not taking the pains she should to speak correctly. I've tried

in every way I could to make her change some things, and she seemed really stubborn about it. She said: 'I reckon I hev to talk like I were rose to talk.' Such a wistful, sad clinging to her old manner of speech she had, I couldn't say anything more. But the other day I said: 'Danny loves you so he is going to copy you in everything. You must set him the right example, mustn't you?' She looked straight in my eyes a moment, and then I saw an idea had struck her."

"She's trying for Danny's sake." Elizabeth knew more of the workings of Lury's mind than any one else. "And yet she does not wish to change for the sake of Dave Turpin. She thinks he may be released some day, — poor child, it's not likely, — but if he is, she does not want to be different."

"If he never is, what will become of Lury!"

"She'll live for the little brother. It might save her from endless sorrow. You can't know. It's a good thing sometimes that people can't arrange their lives to please themselves."

"That sounds — sort of — hard, Aunt Elizabeth."

"I know." Elizabeth spoke sadly. She was looking into the past, and Peg was straining to see the future.

Peg had held Barney off, for she was unwilling to allow any advance to which he was not driven by his love for her. She could wait very happily, for she had her work, and her life was warm and rich and overflowing. She gave daily thanks for her fortune, and Richard Hadley had much ado to keep her within its limits, for it had a limit, as all fortunes have. She had remained longer and longer at the school in the hills, and made shorter and shorter her sojourns

in New York, until her friends there complained that she was being absorbed and lost in her work, and had become a regular old plodder.

Suitors many flocked to her when she was in the city, and none could understand why she should make a recluse of herself, when the arms of the four hundred were outstretched to receive her. None of them would believe, even if they were told, that they had a rival in a struggling young engineer. But Peg carried with her, as she walked away from Elizabeth, a letter from Barney, and she knew her wedding-day was drawing near. There was less in the letter than usual, and yet there was more to grip her heart. Barney, too, was changing. His spirit was becoming released from the chains which had bound it: the desire for financial success, and the gauging power of money and position.

Yes, he was beginning to comprehend the great truth that lovers alone may understand: that nothing, after all is said and done, is worth while that shuts love out. So now he wrote:

"I'm your lover, Peg. I'm just your lover, every day and all the time. I've written Bob to meet me wherever you are. Where shall it be — at your stepmother's or at the school? I'm coming — yes, I'm coming. I shall land at the school next week, and if you are not there, I will follow you up. Bob is to go there first. He's a terribly lonely old fellow. It's his own fault; he should find somebody to be lover to. It's all over, Peg. Money isn't in it. I don't care what you have or what you haven't. It's only what it can do — and I'm your lover. I can't think of anything else just now. This job is done, and I'm coming, Peg, do you hear?

I'm shouting it in my heart; I'm coming, and I'm Peg's lover. I'm a crowned king."

Every now and then Lury also received a letter, misspelled and unpunctuated, but there was the same message. "I'm your lover, Lury." Yet poor Dave could not say "I'm coming." Peg knew Lury's heart was weighted down with a load her own had never felt, and by that very sympathy Lury was drawn closer to the great heart of Peg. Instinctively Lury felt this, and she unfolded and blossomed into a more exquisite womanhood for this nearness.

Yes, Peg's wedding-day was drawing nearer, and after that wedding-day, and Peg was gone on her wedding-trip, what was coming to Lury — what was coming to that other lover? Barney arrived, a joyous, beaming Barney, shedding happiness all over the Settlement and the school, and in the home of the widow Basle, wherever he showed his joyous face. Lury's little brother, plump and lovely as a cherub, followed him about with open admiration. Barney loved him. He seemed to feel that the child had helped him to his own happiness, and truly he was right.

Peg did not wish to go to New York for the wedding. She did not want to go so far from the school, to tell the truth, and Barney did not care. But the stepmother demurred. Why should Peg be married there like a mountaineer? Barney would be calling her his "ol' woman" next. She must come down and live among folks again, she and her husband, too. He certainly needed civilizing a little. They must come to her and do the proper thing for that time, no matter what they might do later on.

Then the banker came forward, and a compromise was made, so that the wedding was celebrated at the home of

Richard Hadley, and the stepmother met them there. Bob stood as best man, and Lury came to the wedding; and no one knew she was the simple mountain girl, in love with a desperate young law-breaker sentenced to be executed for murder — none except themselves. She was another Lury, — straight and slender, fine of mold, shyly observant, and quick to perceive and do as others did.

Daniel McEwen was not there. He was asked, but he did not come. He sat brooding on his mountain top, watching the eagles, solitary and remote, at long intervals come and go. His face was drawn and sad. Things were not going as he wished and had planned. He was baffled.

He sat on his hilltop, his head bowed in his hands, knowing the wedding bells were ringing down below him. He knew those gathered there were his friends, and that he had won many more than these during his term of office, — friends who had influence and power, and who would gladly use it for him, if they knew he needed it. But one among them all he had not been able to bend to his will. He was the kind and gentle judge who had forced himself to pronounce the death sentence against David Turpin. His mind had been set upon justice. He had reached his decision slowly and reluctantly, and he refused to turn from it, unless Daniel made good his word to produce the real culprit before the year was up.

Daniel had steadfastly maintained a brave demeanor and swore that David should be set free, and had walked with high head out of the bank only two days before, but his last interview with the judge had convinced him of the futility of attempting to obtain a new trial, or even to get Dave's sentence reverted to a life term. Bob had visited him as

soon as he returned from his trip, and the visit had been a merry one. Daniel McEwen had easily led him on to speak of his sister's marriage, and from there to his own intentions, and so on to his opinion of Lury Bab. What he thought of Lury and her future and of Dave's future, if he were to have one. What effect his end would have on the girl, and many other intimate things.

From joking and reminiscing over the trip they had made together so long ago, when Daniel had led them that wearisome tramp over the hills in search of a path for the new road, and through mutual confessions of the friendship then formed between Daniel and the two young men, it was an easy step to the rest. Differences of speech and rearing and environment meant nothing to them. It was quite true, as Daniel had said: "Hit's how a man thinks in himself 'at makes him one thing or another. He mount act like a angel o' Gawd, an' be cl'ar plumb devil, fer all anybody'd know, — but th' truth'll be shore to come to light some day, an' thar he'll be."

Daniel had speculated about Lury and her future many times, and he sounded Bob with a purpose. If Dave was set free, he would marry her; but if not, — was there a chance that this rich young man would ever look upon her with the eyes of a lover? If he did, would it mean happiness for her? Would he always feel that he had stepped down to her from a height and make her feel it also?

"Why, I've known all the time, — from the first moment I set eyes on her, — that if she could be taken in hand by the right ones, she would develop into a perfect wonder, and she has. She'd turn some of our belles of the 'Four hundred' green with envy, if they could see her now. She

has what none of them have — she —" Bob paused in the midst of his speech and gazed off over the blue hills undulating, range beyond range, before them.

"Hit wouldn't be hard to go sweetheartin' weth a creeter the like o' her, now — would it?"

"Oh, that's bound to come, and she'll know it, too."

"You reckon she'll hev sense to choose right, ef she hed th' chanct?"

"Choose? She choose? Why — some one will have to choose her, first, or — how can she choose? She will have the privilege of taking."

"Reckon so. Privilege of takin' — what comes to 'er. Wall, women is quare, an' sometimes they do be surprisin'. I hev know'd 'em to th'ow down one as seemed right likely an' peert, an' take up weth 'notheh 'at were hell cheap — but then — mostly sich es thet were a matter of meddlin' er spite. You'll mebby find 'at a gell like Lury'll do some choosin', too."

Now, seated on his mountain, his head between his hands and his ears alert for the sound of the wedding bells far below him, Daniel McEwen ruminated sadly on many things.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CONFESSION

DAVE was given many privileges in the prison, and all liked him. He lost his sullen aspect under the kindness of Daniel McEwen and the hope he continually held out to him. He came to believe that his friend had power to really bring forward the murderer and set him free, and that it was only, as Daniel assured him, a matter of time. Now, when Daniel entered the prison cell, the young man would rise and stand before him, like a son before a father whom he more than loved, — one whom he reverenced as well. Daniel felt this, and it made him sad, but he covered this sadness with debonair good cheer as he entered.

"You shore be growing pearter an' pearter. Ye be a leetle too white in the face, but yer color'll come back fast enough when ye git out o' here," he said, standing and looking levelly in the young man's eyes, his hand on Dave's shoulder. "An' ye be read'n' books an' papers an' writin' letters — sweetheart — be she?"

"I reckon so."

"Wall, hold to 'er fer life 'er death, son, an' when ye git 'er be good to 'er, hear?"

"Ye shore reckon I'll git out o' here an' git 'er? Ye reckon so? I kin wait weth good heart fer sich a thing. I shore will hold to 'er when I git 'er, an' I'll be good to 'er an' earn a heap fer 'er, too."

"How will ye earn fer 'er? Stillin'?"

"I don't guess I will. I mount, but hit be fer her to say. I reckon I'll cl'ar out them Furmans fust thing, an' ef Ellen live, she'll spen' th' rest o' her life lyin' in jail, 'er she won't be livin'."

"I reckon ye'll hev to quit all sich es thet, son, if eveh ye be sot free. The Lord say vengeance be his'n, an' fer all I hev l'arnt in this life, I reckon hit be."

"Ellen Furman hev took vengeance on me fer nothin', an' all know I hev done fa'r by 'em all. I don't guess she'll be let live long afteh I be out o' here, less'n she come here to live."

"Son, leave all sich es thet. I know what-all I'm tellin' ye. A man hev got to bow to th' will o' Gawd. He cain't kick agin hit. I hev done some kickin' myse'f an' I hev l'arnt a heap. I hev took th' law into my own hands, an' I be'n up agin a bigger power 'an I be, an' I got to quit." Daniel dropped upon the stool before the couch, and Dave sat on the edge of his narrow bed, and there they gazed into each other's eyes, but for a while nothing more was said. Then David leaned forward and spoke in a whisper.

"I reckon you hain't did nothin'? Ye be good."

"Naw — son, I hev done ye a wrong, but I'm goin' to make up to ye fer hit all I kin. I be'n 'lowin' ye lie here fer a long year an' a half, an' now th' time be drawin' near fer yer takin' off, an' I be right whar I were at the fust. I cain't git ye cl'ar 'thout I bring forward him what done the deed, an' I'm the man. Son, hit'd he'p me some ef ye'd set thar an' cuss me."

Dave leaned forward and gazed more eagerly into the older man's face. "I cain't believe ye. Ye be givin' yerse'f fer me. I cain't —"

"All right, son. Look a' thar." Daniel handed Dave a box of cartridges. "Count 'em, an' ye'll see th' hain't be'n but one round took out o' thar. Th' be a gun in the sheriff's office, 'er som'ers, 'at was picked up at Lee Bab's feet, weth all them cateriges in hit but one, an' thet one went into the heart o' him as you found lyin' thar weth the gun at his feet. I thow'd hit thar, an' I sont th' bullet, an' hit were what I swore to do long ago, 'fore I done hit."

Dave sat still, dazed, stunned. Slowly his eyelids drooped. His face flushed and then turned deadly white. He strove to rise to his feet, but his trembling limbs would not support him. At last he said weakly:

"I cain't set here an' hear ye say sich es thet about yerse'f. I cain't. I wish hit were Jim — an' then I'd walk out o' here an' go cl'ar an' be happy."

There was a long, long silence, and then — quite suddenly David's strength seemed to come back to him, with a new resolve, a resolve that gave him power. He rose and walked over to the little barred window, and leaned his arms on the stone sill, and his forehead on his arms, and so stood, still, silent.

"Oh, son, I know I've done ye a great wrong, but I hed a reason, er I thought I hed. I reckoned we hedn't neither on us just cause to perish fer he'pin' the world to be rid o' a man like Lee Bab, an' I 'lowed to git ye cl'ar an' then tell ye, an' make up to ye fer hit, too. Now, son, jest you cuss. I'd fa'rly admire to hear ye."

But Dave had no mind to "cuss." He was weeping. Yet he was ashamed of tears and hid them. He loved Daniel, who seemed to be his one and only true friend, and

he was being torn between his love for Daniel, and his desire to live, and his love for Lury; and these three great passions seemed to have devoured all his bitter enmity and the sullen hatred which had so long dominated him after his arrest.

"I'm goin' to th' judge now an' tell 'im the truth; an' as soon as they-all c'n git through weth ther red-tape foolin', I'll step in here, an' you'll walk out, a free man. I hev wronged ye, but I shore hev loved ye, all th' same." Still there was silence, and Daniel perceived that the youth was weeping. Then he rose, lifting his tall form to its full height, and dropping his debonair manner, he stepped across the little space between them and laid his arm gently across Dave's shoulders.

"I reckon I understan' ye, boy. Ye don' like to walk out o' here an' leave me behind? Naw. Hit be like we're kin folks in speret, fer th' be the same thing inside o' each on us. I done what I done fer love o' her, an' now she be singin' up thar weth th' angels. An' yore sweetheart be still walkin' th' earth and weepin', on 'count o' yore trouble, what I'm responsible fer. I hev knowed hit, but I 'lowed to make up to 'er an' to you fer hit some day. You'll walk out an' go to your sweetheart, son, an' thet right soon. Likely Gawd'll 'low me to set som'ers up thar an' look at mine, an' hear 'er sing. Gawd know I hev done a heap o' repentin'. He'll 'low me set thar, I reckon."

Then Dave turned to him. His cheeks were wet and his lips quivering. "I hain't goin' to walk out an' leave you here. I cain't do hit."

"Naw, son, ye'll do what I tell ye, when th' time comes.

I'm right happy now. I hev suffered a heap, but when a man gives up, some way th' comes a peace into his soul, an' I reckon I'll set here right happy like, an' go when th' time comes."

"I mount 'a' done hit myse'f. I mount. Any day I mount 'a' kilt 'im, ef you hadn't 'a' done hit."

"But what mount 'a' be'n hain't what is. I see ye kin read right smaht. Here be a paper fer ye to keep to he'p ye on in a work I be'n doin', an' hit'll be a heap better'n stillin'. I hev writ hit all out how to git th' gold out'n the soil, an' how to dig fer hit, an' ye'll find thar how to find the place where th' gold is at. I hev worked thet mine fer seventeen year, an' the' be a heap o' gold yit, fer him as knows how to git hit out. When you an' me changes places, jest you go up to my cabin and work thet mine, an' leave stillin'. I'll think on ye thar —"

Dave turned on him a clear gaze, reproachful and set. "I be goin' to bide here. I'll sw'ar I done hit, an' they'll be no way fer ye to prove I didn't."

"Whar be thet caterige box?"

"Hit's mine. I'll sw'ar to hit. I'll keep hit, an' ye shan't hev hit back."

"Son, they be no way but the true way. Will ye leave Lury die of heartbreak an' me go to my grave grievin'?" The debonair lift of Daniel's head was quite gone now, and he dropped on his stool and sat with bowed head. He covered his eyes with one hand and held out the other to David. "Put that 'er box in my hand, son. I love ye, an' ye cain't make wrong come right thet-a-way. I tell ye th' truth has to stand, an' the lie go down to hell. They be no otheh way. Gin me the box."

Slowly, reluctantly, and with tears, David drew his clinched hand from his pocket and dropped the box of cartridges in Daniel's palm. They heard the grating of the turnkey's key in the lock, and both stood as he entered, quietly looking at each other, a tremulous smile playing about the lips of each, hand clasped in hand.

CHAPTER XXIX

LURY DECIDES

THE wedding was over, and Lury stood in the banker's home, looking out on the village street, half screened by the lace curtain. She was alone, waiting for Jenny Deal, who was to drive down for her. All the other guests had gone except Bob, and Lury supposed he was gone with the rest. Richard Hadley, with his wife and children, had gone up the mountain, taking the two sisters with them, and only Lury was left.

She felt very lonely, and her eyes searched the empty street wistfully. Everything had been so different from anything she had ever known or seen, — the whole wedding, the flowers, the pretty gowns, and the fun and badinage were all new and strange to her, and life took on a new aspect here in the banker's home. No one would dream, speaking to her, or watching her, what thoughts were passing in her mind. Her past life stretched back to her childhood, a long vista of contradictions and emotions, sometimes of terror, sometimes of eager longing, and short glimpses of joy, but filled mostly with fear, and silent wistfulness, and shrewd contriving of ways to escape from the unkindness of her father, or to shelter her mother from his drunken outbursts of brutality or meanness.

True, he was not always drunk, and there were times when he could show glimpses of a former power of fascina-

tion and a crude humor. He had once been fine-looking, and a trace of that early masculine beauty showed itself when he was sober, and everything had been going to his liking. But up to the time of her mother's death, Lury's life had been dominated by three primeval emotions: fear of her father, hatred of him and his associates, when he had been brutal and they derisive, and strong love for her mother, — a tender, almost unchildish love, always contriving how to protect and shield her.

A vague notion of right and wrong and a strong sense of justice also had been developed in her. This last trait was what now troubled her. Why should David lie in prison, condemned for murder, if God were good, and he innocent? Therefore, since God must be good, — or else the Bible lied, — Dave must be guilty. If so, he must die, for there could be no other way. Yet he had done only what she had many times desired to do. Had she not cursed and sworn many times that she would kill Lee Bab? Had she not told Daniel so, when he found her in Bear Wallow with the babe, hiding from her drunken father? He had deserved it; and so now, when Dave had but administered justice to him, why should Dave suffer death?

Now all her life had changed, and she was in a sweet place, where the former things were thrust behind her as if they had never been, and she was trying to be like those who cared for her and had taken her in. All was well with her now, and the world was wearing a new face. Yet there was Dave. The terrible things were gone out of her life, but still the old terror for one she loved dominated her with the old power. What could she do? Oh,

what could she do! She stood still and straight before the window, her hands clutching tightly her dress skirt.

Bob entered unheard, and had come near to her, when the wind caught the soft lace curtain and wrapped it around both of them.

"Well, well," said Bob, lifting it back and looping it out of the way. "The wind seems to think we belong to each other, doesn't it?"

She looked up in his face as one come back from some sad dream, and smiled wanly. "I reckon."

"Have they gone off and left you all alone?"

"Seem like it."

"Seem like they've left me alone, too."

She walked out into the hall, and took up a long box, around which a suit-case strap had been buckled.

"Are you waiting for some one?"

"I be waiting for Jenny Deal. Miz Deal said she'd send down for me with the top buggy."

"Well, it's getting late for her to take you up the mountain now, isn't it? Will she be alone?"

"I reckon her maw'll come with her. We c'n ride three on a seat."

"I'll take you up in my car. That will be better, won't it?"

She smiled, and with the smile came the peculiar charm of her countenance. She lifted her eyes to his face, and his heart gave a sudden throb of pleasure. No other girl he had ever seen could look on him with such eyes. He thought of the day he had spoken of those eyes first to Barney, and he was pleased with his own perspicacity. His predictions had come true.

"Won't it be better?" he reiterated.

"It will be a heap betteh — for me. Only — are you going, anyway?"

"Oh, yes, I'm going, anyway; yes, indeed."

She followed him in silence, and in silence also she took her place in the car. As they whirled around the curve of the drive out into the street, he glanced at her still, set face and wondered, for the hundredth time, how she came by those beautiful and classic lines. Certainly there outcropping were the traces of a fine ancestry, but the personality of the girl was all her own, molded by her suffering and striving and loving; a new creature, and a quite new and independent beauty. Vaguely he began to recognize this. The desire seized him to analyze her nature and probe into her soul. What right he had in that sacred precinct he never stopped to think. His place in society, unconsciously recognized by himself as far above her, seemed to give him the right to her innermost thoughts; and her reticence seemed to him to be merely shyness, which he was perfectly warranted in breaking down.

How should he begin? Was there not a single thing in common about which they might exchange thoughts? Why, of course, there was Peg.

"Well, I'm a lonely old fellow, now my sister is married and gone."

She only turned and looked in his face with an enigmatical smile. Then she looked far beyond him, and the smile played a moment about her lips.

"What are you thinking, Lury?"

"I was thinking were you lonely all this year whilst you been gone?"

"Oh, traveling about, a man doesn't get so much time to be lonely. He has some change of thought all the time. Do you mind being lonely?"

"I reckon I'd ratheh be lonely than I would have some one nigh me all the time I couldn't abide."

"Oh, that, of course. But I wouldn't stay where there was some one I could not abide. Would you?" he asked.

"If I were tied, I'd have to stay. I reckon it be some different with you. I don't guess you eveh have had to just sit and wait."

Bob stopped a moment to think and caught his nether lip between his teeth. Here was another viewpoint. "No, I've always been able to pull up and go when I got sick of a thing. How do you like the school?"

"I like it fine."

"And how do you like my sister Peg?"

Lury drew a long breath, and the lovely curves came back to her red lips. That alone was enough to tell him how she liked his sister Peg, but still further she had to stir his heart by turning to him her face with the softened look in her warm brown eyes, veiled by the sweep of her curved lashes. He would make her look like that for him. There was no one who would look at him like that, stirred thereto by love for him, and the genuine glow of those eyes, as Lury thought of Peg, made Bob jealous.

"Come, Lury, tell me in words, how do you like my sister Peg?"

"Seem like I cain't tell in words, such a thing. She be far and away beautiful, like heaven angels, only they be out o' sight, and she stay by where we can love her. I reckon if you look in your heart, and see there the sweet-

est thing eveh you know, and think on hit, you'll feel what I think on your sisteh, Miss Peg, betteh'n I can tell you."

"You are a poet, Lury. I wish Peg could hear you."

"She have heard me. I told her when I kissed her good-by that she were more beautiful — a heap prettier — than moonlight on the mountain and I don't know anything more beautiful than that, when the wind blows soft, and the trees all move like laughin'."

"I wish there were anybody on earth who loved me enough to say a thing like that to me." Bob laughed, but he meant what he said.

Then Lury laughed. "I reckon men folks couldn't act like she do. We sure do love Miss Peg a heap."

"There is one thing men folks can do, Lury. We can love as you love my sister, even though we may not be able to act like her."

"You reckon so?"

"I don't reckon so, I know so. There is a difference between reckoning and knowing. Don't you know there is?"

"Yes, I reckon." Then silence fell. Bob knew he had not struck deeply into her soul yet, and he was piqued. He looked full at her, questioningly, but she did not heed. Her face was sad and exquisite in its sadness. She was thinking of Dave, waiting there in his prison cell, waiting for the day of his death. Indeed, her face was so touchingly sad that Bob was melted with pity.

"Tell me about it, Lury, can't you?" he said, bending to her, and the car swung dangerously near the edge of the steep roadside under his careless hand. He grasped

the wheel with the thought that he was indeed in a dangerous place and must have a care. Then, as he brought the car to rights and it shot ahead, he wondered why on earth the place was dangerous? Was it not where he had been drifting for the past two years? Were not pearls found in the slime, and the rarest gems dug out of the earth? And she — what if she were found in a moonshiner's cabin on the mountain top — was that so bad a place? What was the Cove and all her past? She was a thing apart from her former surroundings. He blessed Peg for what had been accomplished in the girl. It seemed as if it had all been done for him — to make her fit.

"Do you reckon God do care for all o' we-uns, whereveh we be, here or yon'?"

"Why — yes, of course. The Bible says so." She said no more, and he drove slowly, watching her and waiting for the next thought. It did not come, and he had to ask again. "What made you ask that?"

"Because Miz Graves say the' be as many souls on earth as the' be stars in the sky, and that seem like a heap. I were thinkin' could God hear all of those souls, if they were in trouble. He might forget some."

"Don't you think God would care for all He created? Would He forget them?"

"I don't guess so, — but seem like He don't care fer them all, or else He didn't make them all, or He wouldn't 'low them to be damned to hell for all time, — when they didn't rightly know what-all they were doing."

Bob waited a moment, calling upon all his philosophical lore, but did not find help. Certainly here were a lot of souls, and what were they all here for, and why should

they have been made, if but for the end Lury so graphically described. At last he threw aside all the wisdom of his student hours and resorted to the only sane conclusion. "Well, a God who has done such wonderful things for us whom He has made will be able to take care of us in some better way than to punish us in the way you say for all time. We ought to be able to trust Him that far; don't you think so?"

"I reckon so." Then silence once more. Still that pitiful sadness of countenance, and Bob could not stand it. He wanted to take her in his arms and ask her to tell him all she had in her heart. Instead he tried to comfort her by diverting her thoughts.

"Lury, do you know what I'd like to do? I'd like to take you where you might see a thousand wonderful and beautiful things I have seen and love. Why, you can't believe what there is in this world. I have traveled quite around the globe. Did you know that?"

Her face lighted, and she stirred in her seat. "I know. Do seeing all such as that make you very happy?"

"It gives me a lot of pleasant things to think about. Wouldn't you like to go about and see a great many interesting things like that?"

"I reckon so — if — if ev'ybody I cared for were free and happy, too. If not, I reckon I'd be right sorry most of the time."

"I believe you, you beautiful, wonderful thing!" Bob clutched the wheel and drove ahead with set face. He was being swept out of himself, and yet he must wait — wait. Then all at once he decided not to wait. The end was, for him, inevitable. He would accept it and take

her. She must be his, and he could make of her the most beautiful, the sweetest wife ever man had.

"Listen, Lury, you beautiful girl. I have something to tell you, and I must drive this car very slowly while I tell it, or we might go wrong." She caught her breath. "Don't you be afraid. I won't drive off. I love you, and I will always love you. I will marry you, and make you very happy. I will think of everything in the world I can do to make you happy. We will go all over the world together and see all the wonderful things in it, and we will be happy all our lives together. Won't we, Lury, girl? Won't we?" She was silent — one of those pathetic, breathless silences. He watched her, and to watch her, he had to steer his car to the side of the road for safety; so there, under a great, wide-branched oak tree, he took her in his arms at last, and kissed her as he had longed to kiss her many times.

"Why so still, dear? Speak, Lury. Can't you tell me you love me, or at least that you will love me some day? Can't you, dear?"

She had not spoken because she could not. Her breath was gone, and her heart throbbed in her throat chokingly. Still he held her, loath to let her free, but she lifted her head and looked in his eyes as if stilled by some emotion, he could not know what.

"We'll be happy, Lury. You'll love me all your life, and we'll be happy — won't we? Say yes, dear."

When at last she did speak, it was in the old way. Her newly learned correctness had slipped from her, forgotten.

"I — I — cain't. Please, Mr. Bob, thar's Dave."

"Dave?" The words had slid from her trembling lips

so softly that Bob could not believe his ears. "Dave? Dave who?"

"Jes' Dave."

"My God, Lury. Do you mean that man who is to be — hung? You can't — you can't love him, Lury. You must not." He released her and sat gazing anxiously at her.

"I be thinkin' on him eve'y day, an' ev'y minute. He lyin' thar wait'n' fer death, an' when they take him — I'll die too, er I'll set yondeh on the mountain — an' jes' wait like he be'n waitin'. Gawd! I kin wait, too."

"Lury, this is terrible — terrible! I never thought you were still thinking of him. How could you, after all you have been taught by those good sisters? Oh, the waste, the awful waste!"

She turned a look of fury on him, but the genuine sorrow and love with which he answered the look subdued it. "Yas, hit be a waste to take a man the like o' Dave, and kill him fer what he neveh didn' do." She spoke sadly and quietly.

"Lury, there isn't a man on earth worthy of you. You don't know what you are, child. I am not worthy of you. I see it and know it. If he dies, you might at least think of me, and let me take care of you. Drop these thoughts. It is inevitable. He must die, and it is too late to help now."

"Yas, hit be too late. I hev been gittin' used to hit all this year, an' I 'low I kin jes' set an' wait, an' maybe do a leetle good on th' mountain some way." He sat as if stunned, and after a while she spoke again. "Ye be heaven good, Mr. Bob, but hit be too late. Remember

what ye said, 'at ef ye were tied to one as ye couldn't abide, ye wouldn't stay? An' th' day mount come when ye'd see how ye couldn't abide me, and ye'd be worse'n lonely. Hit be too late. Ye be heaven good, Mr. Bob."

Slowly Bob turned to her, and once more bent to her and kissed her. "This is for good-by, Lury. I love you, but it is good-by, and I want you to know that I would help you if I could."

"I know ye would, but the' is no help. That's why I asked ye thet 'bout God, did He care fer we-uns like the Bible say. Thank ye."

Now it was but a short climb the rest of the way, and Bob made it swiftly. At the school he lifted her down, and their eyes met for the last time. "Good-by, Lury. God be good to you."

He was gone, and she stood wearily looking after him, holding her box by the strap, the box which contained the pretty dress she had worn to Peg's wedding.

CHAPTER XXX

SALLY CLOUD'S MESSAGE

"WHAT I want to know is why did you throw the pistol at the man's feet, when you had shot him? It would have been impossible by your own showing for the killing to have been traced to you — ever — if you had not done that."

"I reckon thet's why."

"You mean you wished to leave a clue by which you might be taken — you mean it?"

"Well, Judge, the' be a heap o' diff'unce betwixt gittin' the betteh on a lot o' folks what thinks they knows all the' is to know, an' lyin' low while one as is innocent b'ars yer guilt — ef guilt hit be — jes' natch'ly sets in th' 'lectric chair fer ye. Hit be mighty interestin' to keep you-uns guessin' fer a spell, 'long's nobody gits hurt, but this here's diff'unt."

"I see. How did you expect to work it?"

"I didn't expect much. Th' weren't no otheh way, as I seed, to bring Lee Bab to jedgment. You cain't depend on th' law, much, fer sich — an' all is, I reckon whilst I were climbin' up thar to th' Cove thet evenin', th' angels jes' natch'ly turned ther heads th' otheh way, an' didn't fetch in no reports. Likely they neveh seed me fire th' shot." The old smile played around Daniel's lips. He reached in his pocket and drew out the box of cartridges,

and turned it over in his hand meditatively as he continued: "I cain't rightly say — not bein' familiar weth 'im, if the recordin' angel hev anythin' writ in th' everlastin' book agin me along th' line o' killin'. I reckon they be a heap else, but fer killin' — no — I reckon not — much. But this'll prove 'at what I'm tellin' be straight." He rose and stood over the judge a moment, smiling, then placed the box on the table at his elbow. "You'll find one round o' cateriges gone f'om thar, and ef ye look in thet gun 'at was picked up at Lee Bab's feet, ye'll find 'em all thar but one, an' thet one went th'ough Lee Bab's heart, whar 'twere meant to go. Now, by yer leave, Jedge, I'll go on up th' mountain an' sleep one night moeh in my cabin, an' see how them eagles be a-gettin' on, an' when ye sen' fer me, I'm ready. Good evenin'."

"Hold on. Hold on. I ought to have you apprehended now, this moment. Why, you old demagog, you, laying down the law to me all these days, trying to get that man pardoned and saying you might be able to find the right one, sit down here a moment." The judge rose and laid a friendly hand on Daniel's shoulder, detaining him. "Sit down again; I have something to say. Do you know why I have resisted you so steadfastly all this year?"

"Ye were jes' natch'ly trying to do your duty, I reckon."

"Well, yes, in a way. I thought you were in with those law-breakers, and were covertly working against law and order, thinking you could get a man pardoned out any time you wished. I just determined to put an end to such one-man control — setting aside the dignity of the law for private reasons — and so — well, I wish I had recommended pardon for the boy, and I tell you if I had been

gifted with omniscience, and knew what you have just told me, and no living being had known beside myself, the whole thing would have dropped forever with that recommendation. As it is — it must go through. It will have to be life for you, man. I can in honor make it no less." The judge spoke sadly and slowly. Daniel smiled and lifted his head with the old debonair swing.

"Wall, so be it, Jedge. Fer many a year I hev set waitin', and I'll jes' hev to set a while longer. You'll 'low me to bide one more night in my cabin — an' th' be some things I'd ought ter do. I hev an appointment weth a widow down to th' Settlement — she say she hev a message laid on her soul to gin me — f'om Sally Cloud — her as I hev keered fer — well on to a thousand years — I got ter go down an' git hit, an' I'd ought ter look a'ter Bess, —"

"Who's Bess?" exclaimed the Judge, waking up.

"She be my mule, an' a right good friend she be'n to me; an' thar's Josephine — she be th' cow. I'd ought ter look afteh what comes to 'er, an' I'd ought ter see leetle Lury, too. She be growed, an' they tell me — right peart. Thet's all, Jedge. I'll set thar on top o' Ol' Abe, an' be ready. Good evenin'."

So Daniel passed quietly out, and the Judge sat with his chin on his breast, absently drumming on the box of cartridges with his fingers. Well, the law must be upheld and not be brought to naught, and yet, — human law, — it was often a futile sort of thing, striking at random.

The breath of spring was sweet on the hills as Daniel McEwen rode Bess up the mountain from Woodville to the widow Basle's. It was during the morning session

of the school, and Lury was not there, but her little brother was playing by the door as Daniel alighted. He stood a moment regarding the child, then patted him on the head and entered. The cabin was neat as always, and the widow was busy with her back to the door, over a gay quilt which had just been removed from the quilting-frame and was spread over the bed. She was binding it about with a bright, turkey red binding. She turned her head as she heard his step behind her and rose quickly, brushing the threads and bits of cotton from her dress, and setting a chair for him.

"Why, howdy, Dan'l? I be right glad to see ye. How ye gitt'n' on these days? Won't ye set?"

"Howdy, ma'am? I be right peart, thank ye; how's yerse'f?" He took the chair she placed for him and laid his hat on the floor at his side. "Ye cain't complain much's I see o' ol' age, fer th' years certainly do pass ye by 'thout leavin' footprints. I reckon I find ye well, ma'am." Honey-Son came and stood at his side, looking confidingly up in his face, and he lifted him to his knee, and sat absently regarding him, as if he did not really know what he did.

"The child do be growed a heap sence you last see 'im," ventured the widow.

"Why, yes. He be growed, come to think on hit. What be yer name, Sonny?"

"Dan'l Cloud Honey-Son," murmured the little fellow shyly.

"What say?" Daniel drew back and regarded him curiously, holding his cupped hand behind his ear.

"Dan'l Cloud Honey-Son Bab," said the child again in the same shy murmur.

"Lury hev named him 'Dan'l' a'ter you, fer she say he mount 'a' died ef ye hadn't showed 'er how to feed 'im an' gin 'er things to wrop 'im in. She say she neveh 'low them at the Cove know what-all she called 'im, lest they mount say sich as she'd cuss 'em fer sayin'. So she tol' me when I asked her why fer she neveh gin 'im no name but jes' Honey-Son. She say she hev a right to name 'im Cloud, fer hit were his maw's name, an' he hev a right to hit. She shore be peart."

"I reckon she be. Well, Miz Basle, I hev come fer thet thar message ye tol me Sally done laid on yore soul to gin me. Hit be a right smaht spell ago, — an' yit hit mount 'a' be'n yestidy — fer all o' my thinkin' on hit. I may hev to set fer a spell by myse'f, an' I reckon hit'll do me fer thinkin' matter whilst I'm a-settin'."

The widow smiled, and then her face grew grave. "You hev be'n a right patient man, Dan'l M'Cune, but I cain't think settin' thar on yer mountain, wrastlin' in yer mind oveh things ye cain't noways help, be good fer a man. When I gin ye Sally's word, mebby ye'll feel ye hev somethin' betteh to do. Leastways, ye'd ought to."

Daniel rose, and still holding the child in his arms, felt in his pocket and produced a peppermint candy; then he set the little fellow gently on the doorstep and gave him the small white lozenge. "Thar," he said, reëntering the cabin and closing the door after him, "I be ready."

"I know all, Dan'l M'Cune, an' while I cain't blame ye none, I know ye be'n doin' wrong. Sally tol' me how you done, fer she knew she were to die. She say you know what-all were laid to yore door, an' she lay hit on my soul to tell ye to go back to yore own, an' do right by 'em.

That be her message to ye. She say f'om the time she knowed you had sinned fer love o' her, she hev lived undeh th' condemnation o' Gawd, an' she hev tried, and gin her life to save ye from the hand o' Lee Bab, so't ye mount be moved to go back an' do right by 'em."

Slowly, as the widow talked, Daniel rose to his full height and lifted his clenched fist above his head, and shook it as if in the face of an enemy, but the voice of the woman did not cease for that.

"She say you must 'a' knowed what-all they done tol' 'er; she never say nothin' to ye, but when they gin 'er that word, her heart done broke, fer she knew she hed be'n the cause o' yore sin. She say when they gin 'er that word, an' Lee Bab come one day an' took 'er, she jes' went weth 'im like a dead leaf flies before the wind, an' married 'im. She say th' were no other way to turn ye back to th' straight an' narrer way ye had ought to walk. She say she loved ye so as she could 'a' died fer ye, an' she hev lived in hell all these years to save ye f'om sich a hell as be prepared fer th' devil an' all his angels th'ough all eternity. Dan'l M'Cune, this were the word she laid on my soul to gin ye: 'Go back to yore own an' do right by 'em."

As one struck dumb, the man stood before her, trembling with rage. She lifted her eyes to his face and held up her hand for him to keep silence until she had finished, and went steadily on.

"She say hell begun fer 'er when she married Lee Bab, fer Bab, he were drinkin' an' stillin' an' in all the devilment they be to do, but she neveh went back on 'er married word. That were before the Furmans come. Then come a raid, an' Lee were took, an' all the helpers run off, an' she were

lef' an' not a woman nigh, nor a soul to help, ef the men come back; an' she were plumb skeered o' Bab's helpers, they were that bad when they were full o' licker. So she clum up th' mountain side an' sot thar watchin'."

The widow paused a moment as if to give him a chance to speak, but he had dropped into his chair, and sat with his head in his hands, drooping forward as if he had been beaten down. Then she continued:

"She sot thar watchin', an' she seed you go to the house an' look round as if ye were huntin' fer somebody, an' she knowed hit were fer her, an' she rose up an' went down to ye. She said she see danger ahead fer ye. Fer she knowed Lee Bab 'd be sot free some day, an' ef he eveh heered ye'd be'n thar, he'd kill ye. She knowed hit. She say to look in yer face that mawnin', hit were like she were lookin' in the face o' an angel o' Gawd. She say you asked her fer to go away weth ye, an' she say she were that onregenerate and that sore-hearted, she would 'a' went weth ye, ef ye'd 'a' led her into the bottomless pit. She say she would 'a' walked the fiery furnace weth ye — that ther wa'n't no place above the yearth nor under hit, whar she wouldn't 'a' follered ye. They be women thet is thet-a-way, — an' I reckon you knows she be'n one."

Again the widow paused, hoping for a word, but Daniel sat silent, his eyes fixed on that which he alone saw.

"She would 'a' done that, but what she done was to put ye away f'om 'er. She say she sont ye away f'om 'er fer love of ye. Hit were all she could do to save ye fer this worl' an' fer th' next. She say ye asked her fer to git a bill o' divorcement an' marry ye, but fer all she had heard of wrong done another fer her sake, 'at she knowed

she were bein' punished fer lovin' ye, an' you fer thinkin' on her."

"Wrong fer lovin' 'er — Gawd A'mighty know'd — What wrong were hit to thet scoun'rel dawg —"

"You knows she weren't meanin' Lee Bab, Dan'l M'Cune."

"I would 'a' done f'ar by her."

"She say she meant to save ye fer this worl' an' the next. Them were her words. She say fer this worl', meanin' she knowed Lee Bab'd foller ye ontwel he killed ye. Up an' down the yearth he'd 'a' foller'd ye. So be she kep' 'im off 'n ye."

"My Gawd! Why fer did she go down on her knees to me that time, an' hol' on to me ontwel she hed my promise not to tech 'im ontwel she gin me leave? Why fer did she tie my han's that-a-way?" He rose and lifted his clinched fists above his head. "Gawd! I wisht I hed 'a' done hit long ago."

"Set again, Dan'l; they be more to tell. Why fer didn' she 'low ye to sen' 'im to jedgment? Hit were Preacher Price done thet fer you an' her. He come along thar an' tol' 'er thar were only one way fer 'er to save yore soul an' hern, too, f'om hell fieh, an' hit were fer her to set thar an' repent in sackcloth an' ashes, an' submit 'erself to 'er lawful husband, an' live the life. He say thet, an' she hev done hit. She say she neveh would 'a' done hit fer herse'f, — she'd 'a' gone weth ye, like you asked her to, but to save you-uns fer heaven she done hit. She made you gin 'er yore promise to leave Lee Bab be, fer she knowed you'd damn yore soul weth his murder, like Preacher Price done say, as soon as eveh he come off the chain gang. When he come

back thar, she sot weth food cooked fer 'im, an' all doin', like he'd neveh been gone. He mount 'a' guessed a heap, but he neveh knowed nothin', fer Sally were powerful strong at holdin' 'er mouth shet."

After the one outburst, Daniel sat as before in silence. Now the widow paused longer, and turning again to her work she thrust in her needle and drew out her thread with a jerk at each thrust. He lifted his head and saw the set of her lips, as if she were holding back something.

"I reckon ye betteh go on an' say all ye has on yer soul," he said gently.

"I will, Dan'l, but seem like hit were time fer ye to say a word fer yerse'f — ef so be ye hed hit to say. She tol' me how ye done th' hull two years Bab were on th' chain gang. How ye built a shelter fer yerse'f on the mountain side, whar ye could overlook th' Cove, an' thar ye went to bide night an' day, guardin' 'er f'om harm. She say no matter whar ye went by day, thar ye sot watchin' her can'l light ev'y night th'ough them two years. She say how ye kep' 'er in corn-meal an' bacon the hull endurin' time, fetchin' an' carryin' fer 'er, an' neveh say one word to 'er, ner she to you, afteh she made ye gin her yer promise, ner eveh once comin' whar she were at, jes' leavin' hit on the hillside whar she could git hit."

"You be a Godly woman, Miz Basle, but kin ye tell me whar be the sin o' me keerin' fer her like that-a-way?" He spoke with suppressed intensity, but very quietly.

"You'd ought to know what Sally knowed. Who keered fer yore own an' done fer 'em, whilst ye were settin' thar watchin' oveh Sally?"

"Gawd, Miz Basle! I hired a gal to look afteh maw, an'

paid 'er fer hit, too. I keered fer my own, Miz Basle, an done hit well."

"Dan'l, hev Sally neveh tol' ye why fer she quit ye? Why fer — Dan'l, hev Sally neveh tol' ye how she knowed ye lef' yore wife an' chile fer to foller afteh her — makin' out like ye hed none — down thar in th' low country — an' how ye went down twicet a year to —"

"The lie's come home! Hit's come home! One o' the devil's kin be'n up on th' mountain sowin' th' lie on my heels." He rose, and standing close to her, stooped and searched her face with keen, hard eyes. "Who-all of the devil's kin hev fetched the lie up yar? Ye hev tol' so much — tell the rest. Pears like ye hev hed a heap on yore soul."

"Th' be no rest to tell. Sally hev be'n livin' all these years under condemnation fer her part, in takin' ye away f'om yer own."

"Likely ye kin tel me who-all fetched the lie to 'er?"

"I cain't tell ye who tol' Preacher Price, but I can gin ye Sally's word. Hit were fer ye to know she knowed what-all ye done, an' what-all she done in 'lowin' ye do hit. What she laid on my soul to do, were to beg ye to go back an' do fer yer own like you'd ought to, an' leave go thinkin' on her."

"Leave go thinkin' on her? Leave go thinkin' on her? Gawd! How kin I? How kin I?" Daniel relapsed, sinking into his chair by the widow's hearth, his chin on his breast, and his inert hands dropped at his side.

She went to him and put a hand gently on his shoulder. "Kin ye say now, — as ye hope to see her again — on yore soul, — kin ye say hit were a lie, Dan'l?"

Then Daniel spoke without lifting his head, with many pauses. "Miz Basle, twenty y'ar ago, when I weren't better'n a boy, I lived down country, — nigh on to two y'ar. My paw lived oveh totheh side th' mountain, an' we hed words, an' I lef' home. I cain't tell ye what-all I done, — some drinkin' an' some loafin' like fool boys does, — but I married no wife and hed no child, an' when paw sont fer me to come home, fer maw were grievin' fer me, I come home weth clean hands, leavin' no meanness behin' me. Then I heered they were sich a word agin me, an' one night I rode into the village whar I were at, an' faced the crowd weth hit, an' the man what tol' thet word, I shot. I lef' 'im thar fer dade, an' th' sheriff come an' jailed me fer hit, but he got well, an' I come back home, an' thought the lie were killed. An' now, fer thet lie, Sally be dade, an' I be alone."

"Dan'l, I believe ye."

He quivered under her touch. It was enough. The strong, self-sufficient man was sobbing in silence. The tears dropped through his fingers on her hearthstone, tears of sorrow, embittered by fruitless regret. The widow stepped quietly out and left him alone with his grief.

When she returned, Daniel was standing beside the bed, looking down on the gay quilt she had been piecing.

"This be a right smart bit of work," he remarked.

"Yes," she replied, "I have done a heap o' them quilts." Then again there was a strained silence.

At last Daniel lifted his soft felt hat from the floor and stood over her, turning it about in his fingers by the brim. "I reckon I betteh be goin'."

"Ye reckon so? Cain't ye set an' eat a bite 'fore ye

leave?" Her old face worked with kindly, sympathetic feeling.

"I don't guess I betteh. I hain't much fer talkin', not now, an' Lury mount come in — she hev be'n up to my place, they say —"

"She hev. She grievin' fer Dave."

"Tell 'er she no need to. Listen here, Miz Basle. I be'n th'ough a hell o' strivin', an' triflin' an' waitin' fer to git Dave freed like he'd ought to be, but I cain't git them as might free 'im hear reason. I hev worked all I know, an' now I be come to the end. Gawd knows I be beat. I be goin' up yon' to set whar Dave be a-settin' fer the rest o' my life, an' Dave'll come free an' cl'ar."

Then the widow rose and placed a hand on either shoulder, and held him thus, looking steadily in his eyes.

"Ye done hit. I knowed ye done hit. Ye be a good man, Dan'l M'Cune. Ye mount 'a' hid hit all yer life, but I knowed ye'd do right by the boy. Ye'd neveh 'low 'im b'ar yer guilt. Neveh ye say a word more. I know why fer ye've waited all this time. Ye 'lowed to git ye both cl'ar, but hit hain't fer humans to jedge the way o' the Lord. All the lawyers undeh heaven cain't say 'Ye shall' an' 'Ye shan 't' to Gawd A'mighty — ner no smart man like you be, neitheh."

"No. A man have to lay his soul b'ar to the truth an' lie down an' wait. Wall, hit's mo' peaceful like. Good day to ye. Ye be a good frien'."

She held out a shaking hand to this friend, whom she alone had mistrusted, yet believed in. "Good-by, Dan'l. I pray Gawd ye'll git a pardon, fer on'y Gawd know what ye hev be'n th'ough, an' what-all temptation ye had."

She followed him out into the sweet sunshine and stood by while he mounted his mule. "What ye 'low to do weth Bess an' Josephine?"

"I reckon I'll leave 'em weth Dave an' Lury. They'll be right keered fer weth them."

For a moment he sat silent, looking down on her, then with a smile and the old debonair manner, he rode away with a wave of his hand. He took the trail above the highway, and she stood watching his slender figure swaying to the movement of the mule, mounting toward his eyrie, in and out among the fragrant, flowering trees and the budding pines waving their pale green Christmas candles, and the masses of clustering laurel bloom.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE COVE IS DESERTED

Down in Woodville the spring was further advanced than on the mountain. The laurel bloom was gone, and the heavy greens of summer had replaced the tender coloring of the earlier spring days. But as Dave, seated under the hood of his wagon, hurried his mules up the broad, new road, his heart bounded with joy, as each mile brought the beauty of the fresh young season into view. Here the azalea blossoms were slipping down their silken stamens and dropping on the ground, and a mile or two higher they were holding their gorgeous faces up to be kissed by the sun in their perfect beauty; a little farther up, behold, they were only just budding, and still higher, only giving promise of later bloom. He was yet to see it all, — the charm of the hills, — once more it was to be his.

He looped the reins around the handle of the brake and walked buoyantly beside his mules, stroking them and guiding them by sibilant calls and whistles. He answered the thrushes' liquid cadences from the thickets and responded to the note of the wrens; he whistled back to the red birds in the pines and laughed at the scampering chipmunks in the woods.

"Ah, you leetle scoun'rels, you! What ye runnin' fer? Think I'd hurt ye?" The frogs croaked in a swampy

hollow between the hills among bulrushes and cat-tails. "Hid'n', be ye? Wall, hide away, I don't keer." He lifted his voice and sang camp-meeting songs, lingering on the clear, open vowels and lilting the cadences in a clear, sweet tenor. A little hoarse he was at first, after his long silence, but he lifted his head and filled his lungs with the cool mountain air and sang on. "I be so hoarse f'om settin' still thar, I cain't fairly holler, let alone sing." But he sang the hoarseness down.

He was weakened by the long prison quiet and scorned himself, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead and climbed back into the wagon. "I be puny as a sick kitten," he muttered. "I reckon Lury she'll say I be good fer nothin'." But he smiled at the thought, for he knew better. Then he laughed for the mere joy of laughing. He would soon be strong again, and Lury was at the end of his journey, waiting, yes, and she would have the license that he had sent her; she would have kept it for them.

Dave had found his mules in fairly good condition, at a livery stable in Woodville, where Daniel, who had purchased them, had placed them. He had sent Dave there for them, and the young man felt only love and gratitude toward Daniel, in spite of all the sorrow he had caused him. The only unhappy thoughts he had now were those that filled his heart to overflowing when he thought of the man he had so learned to love, sitting brooding for the rest of his days behind prison bars. When he thought of Daniel, he ceased singing and shook his head sadly.

"Them jury men be cl'ar plumb fools to lock up a good man fer riddin' the world of a bad one," he said, sagely grave. "Th' law don't know nothin'." But the joyous

spring all about him would not let him be sad, and soon he was singing again.

A glad heart and hope ahead makes light traveling and a quick journey, but evil thoughts and a guilty conscience makes a lagging pace over a hard road. Whether Ellen Furman had a guilty conscience or not, who may know? Certain it was she traveled a hard road, driven by fear. She had ridden the old mule down the day before with bags slung across his back, supposedly containing clean corn shucks for filling beds at the spring cleaning; but cunningly hid in the midst might be found sundry bottles and jugs of corn liquor, for which she received a far better price than ever she got for her shucks.

Ellen was clever at disposing of their wares and usually returned well paid for her trip. Having now the upper hand of the men, for the possession of the household purse always gives such power, she had become more forceful and dominating, and the men found it easier to submit, albeit with much grumbling, than to resist. The cabin was no better kept, and the food no better cooked, but Ellen had gained more vigor both of carriage and of speech. She had learned that Dave was to be released the next day, and she now fled in haste from the Cove. She dared not be there when the man she had purposely wronged, returned.

Jim was down on his knees, carefully lifting bricks from the fireplace to get the money they had hidden there from time to time. "Ef ye'd heared to me, ye wouldn't 'a' had Dave took," he was saying. He put his hand in the hole and felt about, then lifted his head with a jerk and turned an angry face toward Ellen, cursing deeply. He lifted one of the bricks he had removed and held it as though he

would hurl it at her head, but not being drunk at the time, he stopped, realizing the enormity of such an act.

"That's right; jes' you drap hit. I done put thet money whar ye c'n git hit when ye need hit. I reckon ef ye quit cussin' an' le's we git started, ye'll show mo' sense. Hev ye got them leetle pigs boxed? Then you an' Joe load 'em on th' wagon, an' the chickens, too. I don't 'low to leave them folks have sich as we hev worked hard to raise, whilst they be'n loafin' and playin' the' be too fine fer to bide here an' work fer ther livin'. Hain't ye got them chickens ketched yit? Wall, you be the good-fer-nothing-est, — git out thar an' ketch 'em. Now, don't you an' Joe go an' load up weth licker. Ef you do, I'll take Buddy an' drive off an' leave ye here to be shot up an' lef' fer dead, like Dave done lef' Lee Bab. They hain't no luck lef' on this place. I swear I be glad to git away alive. Sally Cloud be'n ha'nt'n' 'roun' here eve'y sence she drapped, and all the luck be'n gone."

Incessantly talking in this strain while she worked, Ellen threw together all she could pick up about the place and loaded the things helter-skelter on the rickety old one-horse wagon, while the men shuffled about, executing her orders, until the old wagon would hold no more. She wanted to take the bedstead, which was Lury's one great treasure, and had gone so far as to tie up the feather ticking and pillows in a great bundle of the quilts Sally Cloud had pieced for her daughter, and the counterpanes she had woven. These she loaded on the wagon before all else, but when the men came to make room for the pigs and chickens, this bundle was thrown on the ground and finally left behind them in their haste. She uncorded the bedstead,

nevertheless, and threw the rope in among the rest of the goods, leaving the big mahogany frame in such condition that it could not be used until it was re-corded.

Long before the sun had reached its meridian, the rickety wagon with its uncouth load was well on its way toward the State line, Ellen driving, seated in a chair as close to the front board and the old mule's heels as it could go, while Buddy perched perilously on the box which contained the litter of pigs. The men straggled behind, and the old hog was left in her pen, squealing for her brood. Joe Furman humanely went back, after they were well started, and threw what corn they had not been able to carry into the corner of the creature's pen, saying he "reckined hit'd keep the ol' thing from perishin' ontwel she c'd rut 'er way out." But he did not tell his sister-in-law why he turned back and then came hurrying after them.

Thus Lury found things at the deserted home, when she came slowly riding up the mountain a little later in the day. It was spring, and she had been seized with the idea that she wished to see the Cove and the hillsides and blossoming gorges. She had been filled with a strange wistfulness and hunger of spirit, since Bob's impassioned plea for her love had touched anew the cord which bound her to Dave. The marriage license still lay in the old coffee-pot where the widow Basle had placed it, but the gay little handkerchief she had pinned in the bosom of her dress, as always. It represented to her what might have been. The widow had told no one of Daniel's visit or the expectation of Dave's release, fearing there might yet be some slip. The law seemed to her an uncertain thing.

Lury had asked Elizabeth if she might have the whole

day to herself, and ride off alone up the mountain, and Elizabeth, knowing that the day set for Dave's execution was drawing near, realized the need of the girl and had given her consent.

Slowly and warily Lury approached the Cove, crossing the stream and pausing under the blossoming rhododendron where Daniel so long ago had plucked the flower he had laid on her dead mother's breast. She did not wish to see any one there, but only to look at the little patches where corn used to be planted, and at the old, blossoming apple-trees. How she used to love them, in those days when there were so few things lovely about her! Now she knew, from what she had learned of gardening at school, that were those old fruit trees trimmed and dug about, and the soil enriched, they would have value. There were a few pear and plum trees, besides the great, black-heart cherry-trees. Why, the place might be plowed and sowed with blue grass, and the trees might be mulched, and others of different sorts set out, and what a beautiful garden they might have! How sweet the blossoms were! How warmly the sun sifted down over her, where she sat her horse under the overhanging beech boughs, looking out at the little, fertile Cove. Even the neglect of years had not wholly destroyed its beauty.

Old memories crowded on her thick and fast, — sorrowful, torturing, tragic memories, made up of fears and hates, disorders, and cunning watchings and plans to circumvent. Crowded side by side with these were poignant moments of eager happiness, swiftly grasped, and hoped and waited for. Memories of moments with her mother, when they two had been alone together, and the men far away down the

mountain, or at the still; when they had laughed together, and her mother had told her simple stories of her own childhood. Memories of times when she had sat out on the fragrant hillside and watched down the road for Dave to return from his trips into the low country, when she would run to meet him, and climb up by his side, and make him give her the reins. Memories of drifting over the hills with her mother and Dave, going to preaching, when they could manage to do so, and listening to the impassioned voice of the preacher, and shivering at his graphic descriptions of the devil and hell and the tortures awaiting sinners. Memories of unholy joy, when she had successfully lied herself out of difficulties and cursed volubly at those she hated, when she took a sort of poetic, yet demoniac pleasure in inventing terrible things to wish on their heads.

All these things were now in a dream world of her past. They were gone from her, never to return, and yet these strong, uncurbed emotions which had made up that past still called to her and surged up in her, — great, elemental forces, ready to drive her, as a rudderless ship is driven by wild winds at sea. Yet she was not like a rudderless ship, despite her tempestuous nature, for deep within her were qualities of power, of all the best with which humanity is armored.

She could love. Ah, how she could love! She found ecstatic happiness in adoration. How she reverenced Elizabeth and her sister, and how joyous she was in her gratitude to Peg. As from her babyhood she had loved and protected her mother, and then the little brother for whom now she would give her life, if that were necessary, so were nourished and cultivated in her those qualities which

make for greatness: aspiration, self-sacrifice, loyalty, patience, love.

The training and gentle example of the sisters had begun to correlate these qualities, giving them definite purpose and scope. She was learning how to use her natural initiative, and the trained mind was beginning to take the place of erratic striving. Dave was always in her thoughts. Sympathetic by nature, she was intensely so toward him, for gratitude filled her heart as she thought of all the things he had done in the past to help her and to bring her little joys. He was her all now, and he was to be so no more. No one could ever take Dave's place. Honey-Son could not fill her life, for he was to go out into the world and become great, even as mothers expect their sons to do. But Dave and she were to have belonged to each other enduringly, living for each other always. And now, that hope was gone out of her life. Looking out on the little Cove, loving, struggling with herself, and relinquishing, the tears rolled down her cheeks unheeded. She was minded to return to the school, but some impulse caused her to go on. Yet of all things she did not wish to meet Ellen now. She only wanted to look at the place, no matter what sorrowful thoughts might be stirred within her, where she and Dave had lived together and done kindly things for each other.

Slowly and reluctantly she rode around the great rock which concealed the house from that point, and there she paused, gazing in unbelief at its deserted and empty appearance. A fireless hearth, doors and shutters flung wide open, and a bundle of bedding lying among the weeds by the door! She had left her dog behind, but as usual, when she rode without him, he had run away and had followed

her. Now he came dashing past her and ran into the house, nosing and smelling here and there, to her terror, lest he find and bring some one out to her. But why had they fled, for flight it must have been. It could not be that they had been gone long, for she knew Ellen had been in the village and at the school, begging, only the day before.

It could not be that they had heard of a raid, for they would not have deserted in this fashion for that, taking all they could with them. She rode her horse down to the spring and let him drink there. The dog came bounding down beside them and drank also, then dashed away again, off toward the still, making wide circles around the sheds and back to the house. No one appeared. She dismounted and led her horse slowly toward the door, pausing often, but there was no sound, and the stillness awed her. Had some terrible disaster come to them? Then she was sorry, for all of her bitterness toward them. As she gazed in at the door, the evidences of haste in their departure struck her, and she entered and stood beside the uncorded bed.

The time when she had seen her mother fall beside the fireplace was with her again, and that moment came back to her terribly distinct. She saw it all, Jim Furman, Ellen, her mother, growing waxen white in Jim's arms as he picked her up and laid her on the bed, and then her father's distorted, drink-crazed face, as he turned on her when she snatched the babe from the bed and ran. Oh, it was all there again. She raised her arms above her head in agony, then brought them down and covered her face with her hands. All the orderly, beautiful life she had known of late made the past appear to her now by contrast more sordid and horrible. She had learned, not by words, but by

actual contact with good, to measure the abyss which stretches between good and evil, and that knowledge made her know unerringly, later on, the path she must walk.

"Oh, Gawd, Gawd, make me know what to do. I cain't live without Dave — Gawd make me willin'. He'p me make this place like Maw'd love to see hit. Gawd, he'p me."

CHAPTER XXXII

DAVE PLANS

A STEP outside the door among the weeds — a dog's joyous bark — a shadow stretching across the sunlit space to her feet — and strong arms were around Lury, and warm lips pressed to hers. Her heart stopped beating for an instant, and she caught her breath as if she had suddenly been lifted above overwhelming waves that had beat on her, and even as the arms of the drowning cling to one who brings rescue, so her arms clung to David Turpin.

"Oh, Dave, Dave! Ye be livin'!" was all she could say. She felt herself drawn away from the dead, and that time past and gone, and held fast in the arms of life itself, — caught up in the full, throbbing joy of life and love.

"I be livin', Lury. I done come out o' the grave to ye." Indeed it was to them both a resurrection. "Had ye give me up, Lury?"

"I were jes' standin' here, askin' Gawd to make me willin' fer His will to be, — but I couldn't make hit seem Gawd's will fer ye to die, no way. I were thinkin' 'bout ye, Dave, and when ye stepped on the path out yon', hit seemed like ye had come to life out o' my heart, — I were thinkin' about ye so."

"What ye reckon I be'n doin' all this time, Lury? Jes' thinkin' 'bouts you, an' tryin' to make ready to be yer ol'

man, — if 'so be I were let live." He held her close as he talked, and swayed a little, rhythmically, as if the music of joy within him throbbed a measured cadence. "Yas, I were let live — I were let live, Lury."

"How come hit?"

"They l'arnt they had made a mistake, that's how come hit."

"An' Dave — you neveh done hit?"

Dave laughed happily. "An' you made sich a mistake, too? Lury, ye stood thar on the stand, an' I heard ye sw'ar ye know'd I neveh done hit — an' if ye thought I did, ye damned yer soul fer me?" His voice broke, and he held her head clasped to his breast, stroking her hair with trembling hand.

"I would 'a' damned my soul to hell fer ye, Dave; hit were all I could do. I would 'a' laid thar and 'lowed that thar whole jury to tromp oveh me fer to save ye, Dave, I would."

Dave could not speak for a moment, for the choking of his breath, as his heart throbbed and pounded. "She would 'a' done hit. She would," he repeated.

"Yas, Dave, I would."

"An' thar I weren't worth hit. No man livin' on earth be worth the like o' that."

"You be, Dave."

"Come out in the sun, whar the air's clean from all 'at has been. You and me has words to say to each otheh." So they went out in the sun, and found Dave's mule and the horse Lury had ridden up the mountain, browsing quietly together among the weeds.

Dave stroked the mule's side as they passed. "He do

love comp'ny, that mule. He hollered fer his mate all way up th' mountain. They hain't so much diffunt f'om folks, be they?"

"I don't guess they be. What's come of Jim an' Ellen an' Joe, ye reckon? Eve'y thing be tore up, an' all gone to wonst; I neveh heard o' sich as that."

Dave stood still, as if he had not before noticed his surroundings, or anything but Lury. All else seemed indifferent to him. He did not let her away from his side, but held her as they moved with his arm about her. Now, as he took in at a glance all the evidences of haste and sudden flight, a smile slowly dawned on his face, a twisted, grim, disfiguring smile that made Lury recoil.

"Don't, Dave." He looked down in her face, and the smile changed. "How about hit, Dave? What's come to 'em? I'd hate hit fer 'em to come here now and see we-uns. I feel like her eyes on me now would smut my soul."

"I reckon I know what's come to 'em. They hev heared I be sot free, that's what's come to 'em." Lury shrank from him, thrilled by the smothered anger in his tone. "Thar, Lury, don't leave me. Stan' close. Ye've saved me from sin this day."

"What did you come up here for, Dave? I thought hit were to find me."

"Naw, Lury. I stopped first to th' Settlement to find you, an' Miz Graves say you had rode up th' mountain fer th' hull day. Then I come up here to cl'ar out a nest o' skunks. I reckon they heared me holler an' shout, comin' up the mountain, an' cl'ared therselves out."

"Oh, Dave, leave sich as that be."

"If I hadn't found you here, I'd 'a' follered 'em cl'ar into

kingdom come an' a bit further, an' I reckon Ellen knowed what was comin' to 'er."

"Dave, now all is past, and you free, neveh you stain your soul tryin' to git back on 'em. Leave 'em be."

"Yas, hit would be a stain, shore 'nough, to hev Ellen Furman's blood on me. I'd rutheh hit'd be cleaner'n hers what I stains my soul weth, an' she be a woman, too. I don't guess I could shoot a woman. An' here you be so peart an' putty, hit be a shame to speak yore name an' hern in the same breath. They done us right well cl'ar'n' out like they done, an' they won't neveh come back, neitheh."

Dave had grown voluble with his happiness. The dog stood looking up at them, wagging his tail and giving short, happy barks. He stooped and patted his head. "You be happy too, Clip. You knows a heap."

"He foller me eve'ywhar I go. Ef I lock 'im up, he git out an' foller."

"Clip an' me we be two of a kind. They done locked me up, an' I git out an' foller. Hev ye got thet paper I sont ye by Sim Arlin'ton? Hev ye got hit, Lury?"

"Miz Basle have hit keepin' fer ye."

"Why'd you eveh leave hit out'n yer han', Lury?"

"Hit's safe, Dave." Lury laughed happily.

"Le's we go back thar now an' git hit. I has use fer hit this day. How about hit, Lury?"

"Hit's yourn, Dave. Hit weren't no use to me." With the mention of the license, Lury's thoughts turned to practical matters. "Dave, will ye carry that bundle o' things they have left into the house for me? I reckon hit may rain. What-all they have left hit there for I cain't see. They took the bed-cord, an' left this out here, an' the hawg

is squealin' in her pen like to perish. You reckon they 'lowed to come back fer the hawg?"

Dave hurried about, doing as she asked, while she closed the house door and the shutters. Then he returned and lifted her on her horse, buoyantly happy and still voluble. "Come back nothin'. They don't keer ef she perish o' hunger. They done took her leetle pigs, an' she's a-squealin' fer 'em. She got 'nough to eat fer now. I'll be back to see to 'er an' do all."

Then he began to plan how he would leave her with the widow until he had set things to rights about the place. She was never going to live there in the old way. She should have things as they ought to be. He would put windows in the house and paint it, and she should have a posy garden around the door. He would plow it for her, and now was the time to plant the seed. She should plant what she liked. So, as they rode down to the Settlement, many things were talked over. She told him how she had kept the money he had sent her for him, and what they would buy with it, and he praised her and told her there never was such another on the whole mountain, so peart and good to look at.

He had refrained from telling her of Daniel McEwen's part in all that had transpired in his own long imprisonment, and now in his freedom. He hated to think of Daniel in prison, and in his heart he bore not the slightest resentment. Daniel had completely won his love and his fealty. But when at last Lury asked how they came to find out their mistake, he reluctantly told her all he knew. Then while she wept, he comforted her.

Then David told her of the attempt Daniel had made

toward reparation for what he had done. How he had given them the clue to the gold mine and directions for working it. Also how he had recommended that they live in his cabin and go no more to the Cove. Then, while Lury rode thoughtfully at his side, Dave told her how he meant to run the still as it had never been run before. How profitable it might be made, if it were done right. He seemed to have no idea of changing his life in that respect, as if the business had had nothing to do with the disaster and degradation that had been. Still in his eyes the business was honorable, and the law of no value, unjust and to be set one side. His experience of unjust imprisonment had done nothing to make him respect courts of justice. The word had no meaning to him.

Nor did it seem to occur to him that he should ask Lury's advice in the matter. She was to be his ol' woman. He would always be good to her. He would do things to please her and make her happy. It should be the aim of his life to "do for Lury, and make over her." But it never occurred to him that she should have any option in the matter, nor any jurisdiction as to the course of their joint lives; nor that, as this place was after all hers, she should say something about the management of it. Vaguely she felt this, as he talked and she pondered. Things were not to be as she had planned, when she sat her horse that morning and looked over the old orchard, and thought of the good and wholesome things she intended to do with it. Then she had feared that she and Dave would never be together. She was trying to adjust herself to life alone. But it broke her heart to think why it must be alone, and all the solace she had then was in those plans and how she

would carry them out. Now they were all swept out of her grasp, and by the one in all the world she would give her very soul for. Mysteriously she suffered as she listened to his talk, and yet she did not know why, in the very midst of her overwhelming happiness, she should suffer.

That something was wrong she felt. She loved his masterfulness and could lean upon it. She had been alone in her life, and necessarily had had to plan and take the initiative, and often she vaguely longed for stronger arms and a stronger will to rest in, even as women do. Now they had come to her and taken her and enveloped her, and something was wrong. The birds around her sang wildly, joyously, and when she looked up at Dave, she smiled, and he smiled back at her, content and happy. So they rode back to the home of the widow, and the license was brought out, and they sat together on the doorstep and read it, and laughed joyously to think how Dave had stated her age more than it was, and then had had to wait for her to reach that age before he could marry her, after all.

It was better so. She realized it now. How young and ignorant she was then! And still, how young and ignorant she was! but this she did not know. Honey-Son sat on Dave's knee, and Dave laughed merrily when he learned his name from the child's lips. "Dan'l-Cloud-Honey-Son-Bab."

He laughed again as the thought grew on him. "Lee Bab's son named Dan'l Cloud. You be peart, Lury."

"I don't keer. He hev a right to a good name, an' he's goin' to be brung up good, too."

"He be. We'll bring 'im up like he'd ought to be. We'll school 'im." Dave certainly meant right but he was

going to run a moonshine still to do it. He had not the slightest idea of the real danger to himself. The psychological evil of the influence on himself of always being in a business involving secrecy and law-breaking was far indeed from his comprehension. Yet, already it had begun its work. When the widow asked him what he meant to do now for a living, and why he did not live at the Settlement, he made excuses and held his secret in his own heart, knowing well she would oppose him as being in a dangerous business. He glanced from time to time in Lury's face, but she did not betray him.

Thus she lost the lesson and help she would have had from the good old woman. Already her lot was thrown in with Dave's, and already she was taking the woman's part of shielding him and siding with him outwardly, if not in her heart. She even began to contrive in her mind a way to carry out her own plans, circumventing Dave's, innocently uncomprehending the fact that in so doing she was beginning a course of disloyalty to her husband. She began by telling the widow how they would do the things she had thought out and had learned in school, and Dave, listening, thought them clever. He thought also that they would be the best kind of a blind for his own business. No, Lury could never alter his determination of going on with the still by so excellent a way of aiding him. She did not even know yet that she wanted to do that, yet there was something about it that was not to her liking.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DANIEL'S GIFT

DANIEL arrived in the place where he was allotted to spend the rest of his days, and sat there thinking, as he told the widow Basle he would, of Lury, of his old love, of the long past and of the lonely, empty future. It seemed to him that the daughter of his lost love should belong to him, and that if he were doomed to live apart from her, he might still have an interest in her life, and perhaps, from the prison cell, he could watch over her welfare and make her way smooth, and the thought brought him comfort.

During his isolated life he had made few friends in spite of his natural geniality, but the few were loyal, and from time to time one or another would visit him. Thus it came about that Richard Hadley entered his cell one day as he sat thinking of Lury and the way he might serve her.

"Wall, I reckoned ye mount come some day, and I be glad to see ye." Daniel rose and extended his hand. His face had lost its tan, and his pallor and closely cropped hair so changed his appearance that his caller was taken aback and scarcely knew what to say for an instant. He perceived his friend's embarrassment, and his old, derisive smile played around his lips for a moment, as he lifted his hand to his head as though he were putting back the lock that used to sweep his brow. "Gov'nment hev be'n makin' me right good-lookin', accordin' to ther taste, on'ly

they hev got these stripes runnin' th' wrong way to please me," he said, whimsically glancing down at his long lean figure in its striped convict's suit.

"I see. It's a beastly shame, McEwen."

"Hit's regular. Ef a man do what gits 'im here, he got to take what's comin' to 'im. I see you lookin' well, sir."

"I am. I came to see if there is anything we can do for you. Sorry I couldn't get here any sooner."

"Thank ye, thank ye. Soon or late be much the same here. Hit's right friendly in ye to come any time. I were jes' thinkin' 'at I'd like to see you of all men abouts now."

"Good. Something I can do for you?"

"I reckon th' be. I mount as well explain a leetle, sence they mount be a reason later on fer ye to know, 'at I hev one as had ought to 'a' belonged to me, to keer fer. You knows betteh'n any one what my circumstances be, fer I be'n bankin' weth ye, all I has. I'm feared she be goin' to hev trouble 'bouts her place — the place she think belong to her. I reckon, as things stand, hit don't rightly belong to 'er, an' I want to git 'holt of hit an' fix things so 't hit will be hern, rightfully and legally."

"I see. Is there any one else to lay claim to it?" Richard Hadley paused a moment and then asked: "May I inquire who she is?"

"Sartain, sartain." Daniel regarded his friend a moment keenly, then continued: "She be the daughter of the woman 'at were stole from me — of her as I have spent my whole life grievin' fer — an' lovin'. She be Lury Bab. I'm feared the Furmans has some rights in the place whar she an' Dave be livin', an' I want you to look up the title deeds o' that place and hev th' boundaries fixed."

"Hit's a heap betteh she don't know she mount lose hit ontwel all's done, fer hit'd disturb 'er mind an' contentment some, an' weth yore help I kin set here an' watch oveh 'er, an' see 'at she be done squar' by. I tole Dave he mount have my place top o' ol' Abe, but seem like they think dif-'unt. Th' be a heap o' back taxes on th' ol' Bab place to pay up, I reckon. Ef you'll get eve'ything straight, and hev yorese'f appinted guardeen to her leetle brother, so 't ye c'n git th' hull property in yore name an' pay all debts, I'll thank ye, and I'll pay all th' is to pay, an' then turn th' hull thing oveh to her an' th' boy, legally, so 't she neveh will hev trouble. I reckon ye c'n do this on th' quiet-like, cain't ye?"

"I don't believe there's a paper or a deed to be found. They have been such an ignorant lot, and Bab probably had no papers, or if he had, very likely the Furmans have them now. I take it if they thought they had any legal claim to things there, they would be very glad to sell out and make what they can out of it, for they never would dare go back there and face Dave."

"That's my idee. As long as they think they mount have rights in the place, they'd never leave 'er be. Ef ye could leave 'em know they do hev rights thar, an' then buy up them rights, I reckon they'd sell quick, ef fer no otheh reason than to spite Lury an' Dave. I know the hull crowd. They be alluz keen to do spite work. Bes' thing be to leave 'em do hit. The Cove be a right smaht of a place, an' good land, too, an' Lury'd grieve to lose hit."

"How did Bab ever come to own it, anyway?"

"He come by hit th'ough Sally Cloud. Her paw owned hit, an' he moved away an' let hit, an' fer years hit were worked by Bab's fatheh, an' they located th' still

thar; an' so, when he married Sally he jes' natch'ly took all."

"Well, then I don't see but what it is Lury's, after all."

"I reckon so, but laws is quare. Her mother's prop'ty'd go to Bab, an' his prop'ty'd go to his kin. Talk 'bouts jestice! I hev l'arnt 'at law be one thing, an' jestice be anotheh. To git jestice, a heap o' times we has to git 'round th' law. Thet's hu-come I be here. Legally I belong here, but accordin' to jestice I belong up on Ol' Abe, watchin' th' eagles."

"Well, I'll see what I can do, and no doubt I'll succeed."

Thus Daniel, sitting in his prison, still had an interest in life. Lury knew nothing of the difficulty likely to arise against her peaceable occupation of the property which her mother had brought to Lee Bab until Richard Hadley rode up to her door one day, and placed in her hand the papers which gave her uncontrolled right to the property. Then, when she learned that Daniel McEwen had redeemed it and saved it to her and her little brother, thus protecting them from endless litigation and trouble, she wept. She believed it was Daniel's way of making up for the long year and a half of imprisonment which Dave had borne for him.

"I wish Dan'l M'Cune were settin' up yon' on his mountain," she said sadly, holding the papers in her hand, but not fully realizing their value to her and her husband. Then she lifted her beautiful eyes and looked in Richard Hadley's. "I reckon these have cost some money?" she asked.

"Why, yes. He had to buy up the Furmans' interest in the place. He knew the law would not give it to you, but to Lee Bab's kinfolks."

"An' I hadn't no rights here?"

"Legally, only partial rights; it belonged to them after Lee Bab's death."

"An' I done them a wrong?"

"Not knowingly. By rights, it should have been yours, but legally it was not. It came to Lee Bab through your mother. It should have gone to you and your brother, and to no one else."

"An' they have been right paid fer hit?"

"They have. Not only paid right, but paid liberally for all the legal right they could claim, so you need give yourself no uneasiness on their account."

She stood a long moment thinking before she spoke again. Then a faint red stole into her cheek, and her eyes looked up at him wistfully. "You reckon Gawd 'low maw to know how we gittin' this f'om her, like? Who have paid the money fer this? Hit were Dan'l's money, likely?"

"Yes, he paid the money for it." Richard felt the spell of her peculiar beauty, a spiritual charm hard to define. He sympathized with Bob Kitchel, and did not wonder that he had been swung out of his old conventions by it, and been willing to take her for better or worse. Now she had become the wife of a moonshiner and a man who might any day be sent on the chain gang for law-breaking. He felt he ought to drop a word now while the chance was open to him.

"Where's Dave to-day?"

"He be down the mountain, likely to Woodville."

"He goes pretty regularly, does he?"

She looked off in the old way, withdrawn, inscrutable.

"He works 'round home a heap. He rais'n' things on the place."

"Yes, but he goes on with the still, I am told."

She looked up quickly, defiantly. Then the banker's kindly smile disarmed her reserve, and the tears filled her eyes. "I cain't he'p hit," she said.

"It's not a good business. He ought to have taken Daniel's advice."

"I do a heap o' thinkin', but — some day I reckon he'll change. He's makin' good money, an' he say this 'n is his, an' some day, likely, Dan'l M'Cune'll git his pardon, an' thar the mine'll be like hit were when he lef hit."

"Dave is wrong, Lury. This is not his; it has been made yours. It is now absolutely yours."

"You tell me all 'at belongs to a woman goes to her ol' man."

"Well, while you live, it's yours."

"Dave have the money, an' he'll pay all they is to pay fer this. Will ye thank Dan'l M'Cune fer hit? Thank ye. Ye have been right good."

"Don't let Dave pay for it."

"Dave have the money. I cain't pay fer hit."

"Don't pay for it. Daniel McEwen has a right to do it, and it makes him happy, — far happier than if you were to pay him. Can't you let him have that pleasure?"

"I reckon so, — leastways he be like he were our own kin, — an' betteh'n a heap o' kinfolks."

"That's right. Stick to that. Let him feel that you and he are the same as kinfolks, and let him do it. It will do him good."

"I will, ef Dave say so. Thank ye."

Richard Hadley rode away with many misgivings, and looked back, as he turned to take the path around the boulder which hid the house so effectually from the road across the ford. Lury stood gazing after him, drooping a little, and she smiled back at him and waved her hand to him, but the smile was wistful. After he was gone, she walked slowly and thoughtfully into the house and carefully read the papers.

She could not make much out of them, but she saw that her name was there more than once, and her mother's, and that now all belonged to her. Dave's name was not there except where she was mentioned as his wife. She was sorry. They ought not to have left Dave out, since he was her ol' man. There it was: "Wife of David Turpin," but it was her property and her brother's, and not his, that she could see. With a little sense of shame, she laid the papers away in a secret place, and when David returned, she did not show them to him, but she told him about them.

Strange to say, he did not seem to care that the place was hereafter hers and not his. That they had come so near not having it at all was what impressed him most. He muttered a curse when he learned that legally it had belonged more to the Furmans than to them. He merely accepted the usual understanding of marital rights as being vested in the man, and told Lury he had been a dumb fool not to have looked after the matter himself before that.

"I mount 'a' know'd hit were thern. An' ef they hadn't been so plumb skeered, they mount 'a' knowed hit, too. They mount 'a' turned we-uns out o' here long ago, ef they weren't plumb fools."

"Mr. Hadley say they have got all 'at were thern by rights now, an' I be glad we're shet of 'em."

"I reckon I'd ought to make a trip to Raleigh an' see Dan'l M'Cune fer this. I got money to pay him."

Now, at this, something clutched Lury's heart. She had thought deeply since the banker left her, and she wanted it to stay as it was. There were reasons why.

"Mr. Hadley say betteh leave hit be now, fer Dan'l M'Cune be like he were kin to we-uns, and hit do him good to do hit."

"I don't 'low no man to gin me prop'ty 'thout I pay 'im fer hit."

They sat in the doorway, and Dave's arm was around her, for he loved to "make oveh her." He kissed her, and she felt again the sense of shame; and still, something told her it was better to leave the matter as Daniel had left it.

"Mr. Hadley say hit'd be a pity an' a shame to take Dan'l's happiness from him by not 'lowin' him do hit. If eveh he git his pardon, we c'n pay him back, see?" They had begun now to talk of a pardon for Daniel with assurance. It was a thing mooted on the mountain-side, and Richard Hadley had undertaken to represent the mountain people in the matter. He had determined on his own account to get it, when there was a chance to bring self-interest to bear on the governor, as the surest way of gaining the point. Yet things moved slowly. But the time would be sure to come, with the revolution of the political wheel, when a pardon must be granted to secure the mountain vote. Such things had been known.

CHAPTER XXXIV

LOVE OR DUTY

Lury's talk with the banker had left her uneasy and troubled. She had not felt secure since her marriage. She thought often over the sermon of Preacher Price, and what he had said about "putting the bottle to his neighbor's lips." Surely this was what Dave was doing all the time. He insisted it was the right of the men to have it, and he had a right to sell it, and the law could not stop him. Then he was always talking about the cave, with its store of liquor and all the money it would bring them yet, even if he never made a bit more and closed the still for good.

The more she thought it over, the more she realized the enormity of their offense ethically. Dave's arguments gradually seemed less and less conclusive. Had not all her life long been one rebellion against her father's drunkenness? What if Dave should take to drinking! What if Danny should grow up to be like his father! Danny had such a gay, joyous nature. He had no more sense of right and wrong than the birds of the air. He went and came as he pleased, and was only moved to obey her by an appeal to his affection for her. No other motive seemed to touch him. He would do as he would. He would follow Dave to the still and insist on riding down the mountain with him, and even Dave had no control over the child.

Lury complained that Dave spoiled him, yet so tenderly she loved them both that they ruled her, a pair of despots.

It remained to be seen whether she would be able to overrule David, when she became convinced that she herself must take action against him, or see him fall. It was not his arrest she feared, but that he himself might go wrong. Day after day she fought out the battle alone. She longed to take the question to the sisters, or weep out her troubles on the bosom of the widow Basle, but she would not say a word against Dave even to the widow, much less to those who had seemed never to approve of her marrying Dave.

It was a matter she must deal with by herself, and as she became more convinced of the iniquity of Dave's course, even if he himself did not touch it, she grew more tender of him and more eager to hold him close to her heart. She felt herself weak as water, when she tried to take a stand against him. Still, for all the strife within her, a larger grasp of the whole question came to her. If it were terrible to think of Danny's ever becoming a drunkard, what must the reality be to others? And even if men had the right to buy liquor and drink, as Dave said they had, did that make it right for him to provide it for them?

There was Jenny Deal. She had married Sim Arlington. She knew he would drink sometimes, but she thought he would stop when he was married. He had promised her he would; but he was not stopping. He was rioting and making his good old mother unhappy. He was often in jail for disturbing the peace. He got his liquor from Dave. She knew he did. Jenny had even climbed away up to the Cove to beg Lury not to let Dave sell Sim liquor, and Dave swore he would not. Still Sim got it, and however he came by it, it was Dave's liquor.

One evening David came home elated and rollicking with joy. He leaped from the wagon and came bounding in where Lury bent over the fireplace, with Danny astride his shoulder, driving him and shouting "Gee haw." Lury lifted a flushed face to him, and he dropped the boy and caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"My ol' woman," he said exuberantly. She was used to these outbursts and only smiled indulgently as she turned again to her cooking. He had been gone two days, and she had been alone with her thoughts, and her eyes had a wistful sadness in them as she moved about the room from fireplace to table and back.

"Take Danny out an' wash up, Dave; I be ready fer ye to eat." He thought her weary manner was because she had been alone those two days, and he said nothing more, but obeyed.

When he returned from the spring, he watched her covertly, as he laughingly described his trip. He had a reason for his gayety. It always elated him when he had eluded the officers by some clever trick. He rose triumphant to the occasion and was always a little hurt if Lury did not laugh with him. To-night she was unusually grave, but very gentle and sweet. He had seen her mother go about so in the old days, and the look touched his heart, but he rebelled against it. Had he done anything to make her look like that? Not he. So he rollicked and laughed the more and told a merry tale of how the sheriff in Plainsville had got Danny off by himself to make him tell what they carried in their wagon, and Danny would only say, to each cunningly put question, "Honey." And how, sure enough, when they came to search, they found only honey in the

jugs, for he had found a bee-tree the night before, on his way down, and had sold his full load of liquor the first day. Then he had returned half-way up the mountain and had robbed the tree, and filled the empty jugs with honey, and had toted them back over the route where he knew the officers were lying in wait for him, and had left the child in the wagon while he made a pretense of sneaking one jug into a house. And thus, after luring them on to follow him, they found, to his delight and their own discomfiture, that he had only taken a present of honey to the woman.

"I declar, hit putty nigh ruined 'em. Noth'n' make 'em so mad as to foller me up an' find I be straight. They s'arched an' they smelt all them jugs, an' they sniffed at the corks, an' me stan'in' laughin' at 'em. I said: 'Look a here, you fellers; you smellin' at my clean jugs o' honey, an' yore breaths so full o' licker ye cain' tell honey f'om still slop. Ef ye fin' ary tast o' licker in one o' them jugs, I'll make ye a present o' hit.' I had left them jugs in Rock Creek half th' night, 'fore I put th' honey in 'em, whar the water jes' natch'ly poured oveh 'em an' in 'em, and them corks were all new, — hadn't be'n used fer nothin', — an' thar I drove off, an' lef' 'em thar, cl'ar plumb ruined."

He watched for approval in Lury's smile, but knew she withheld it, although she came and slipped her arm about his neck and rubbed her soft cheek against his.

"How about we havin' some o' that honey weth this 'er hot brade? I kep' one jug fer you, Hon'; I jes' love to git th' officers follerin' me, an' make out I be dodgin' 'em, an' thar I were layin' low fer 'em weth a load o' honey."

"Dave, I'm skeered they'll neveh stop ontwel they do catch ye. I wisht ye were in some good work, Dave."

"Aw, Lury, set an' eat, an' quit thinkin' on sech es thet. I hain't goin' to 'low 'em ketch me. I think too much o' you to 'low 'em git holt o' me. Ef they should ketch me, I got money to bail out an' come back home to you. I carry 'nough fer a fee next my skin, ev'y time I go down mountain."

Now this statement surprised Lury. It only assured her that there was the danger she feared, and that he knew it. She was not comforted by his happy nonchalance. After supper, she went out where he was working around the stables, and stood watching and talking a little. He never would allow her to do the out-of-doors work when he was there, as many of the women did. He was proud also of the fact that things were changed all about the place, as he had said they should be. There were windows of glass where once were only wooden shutters. The cabin had been newly roofed and painted. He had made a garden for her also, as he had promised, and flowers and vegetables were growing, where before were rank weeds.

He liked to have her follow him about thus, and all the time he kept up his cheerful boasting of how he could keep out of trouble and make good money every trip. Lury was more silent than usual this evening, although she laughed when he wanted her to, and smiled when he passed her carrying feed to the stock, and went with him down to the stream when he watered the mules, leading one of them, while he led the other and held Danny on his back for a ride.

"Look at him sittin' up thar. He look no bigger'n a skeeter. Don't kick the pore mule, son; ye mount hurt 'im er skeer 'im one," he said, as the small chap kicked his

little bare heels against the unheeding big mule's sides. "See that long ear o' his'n pint'n' back to'ds ye? He plumb skeered at ye."

All this time Lury was trying to gather courage to oppose Dave. When he was with her, she felt weak; but when he was away, she was made strong by her love for him. A battle royal was going on in her own heart, and she was growing afraid of herself, lest she should not have the force and courage to win. As the dusk gathered around them, and Danny was sleeping, and they sat together in their doorway, Lury at last crept close to Dave, and drew his head down on her breast and held it there, close and fast.

"I be'n thinkin' a heap, Dave," she said.

"I know ye hev, Hon. I reckon ye' betteh quit thinkin', Lury. Hit's no good you settin' here an' thinkin' like you do. I made a good pile o' money this trip, an' you know what? I goin' to git ye a cook-stove, so 't ye won't spile yer putty face stoopin' in th' heat cookin' fer yer ol' man."

"Don't, Dave. Ye make hit hard fer me to tell ye what-all I got to tell. I goin' to do some'p'n 'at'll make ye awful mad, Dave."

"Now jes' hear at her talkin'. Thet's Lury talkin'. How about it now, makin' Dave mad? Ye reckon ye kin?"

"Dave, I want ye to quit stillin'. I wisht you'd go up an' work thet gold mine Dan'l M'Cune give ye."

David raised his head and felt in his trousers pocket and drew out a packet of money and laid it in her lap. "Hit's all yourn. You jes' think what I done yestiday an' to-day. Fifty dollars took in one trip, an' hain't all paid in yit.

Th' be mo' comin'. Why, Lury, I couldn' make all thet workin' mine."

"I hearn Dan'l be right rich."

"Dan'l knowed how to lay by."

"So do we, Dave. I learnt that long ago." She rolled the money together without counting it and placed it back in his pocket. "You keep hit, Dave. I don't need hit, an' time may come when you will." Her lips were set in the thin, straight line, and her head was lifted. "How much have ye now, Dave?"

"I don't guess I know, — hevn't counted lately. You knows we used the money M'Cune give me fer th' mules on the house here, an' I were 'lowin' to git a new worm fer th' still, fer th' ol' one be'n cut up some."

"Dan'l M'Cune be'n that kind, givin' us Bess an' th' cow. I wisht I could see 'im. I'd love to talk to 'im. I reckon he'd feel right bad ef he know'd ye were runnin' paw's ol' still. I know you'll be took yet, Dave, an' I hate to set here thinkin' all day whilst ye be gone 'at maybe ye'll not come back."

It was dusk, and Dave peered into Lury's face but could not see the set look in her eyes. He slipped his arm around her and drew her close. "Dave'll always came back to ye, Lury. Neveh you set an' think sich as that. I'll leave Danny weth ye afteh this, even ef he do screech an' holler."

"I wisht ye would leave 'im. I don't like fer 'im to be down along weth ye when ye be licker sellin' an' them drinkin'. All them as drinks licker goes to th' bad, an' seem like them as sells hit mount go to th' bad, too. Look at Sim. He no good now."

"Lury, you think I'd break my promise to you?" Dave's

voice was hurt, and he removed his arm. "I haven't give 'er sold Sim one drap o' licker sence I tol' ye I wouldn't."

"I know ye hain't, Dave. I know ye wouldn't, but you totes hit down mountain."

"Well, — you want I sh'd git some one else to tote fer me? I kin."

"Oh, Dave! Dave! I don't keer who totes hit. I'd as leave ye 'd tote hit as make hit. I be'n thinkin', Dave."

"Nex' time I go down mountain, I be goin' to tote you weth me. I hain't goin' to 'low ye set here an' think. I be right mean to ye, Lury, leavin' ye be here alone, thinkin'." He took her again in his arms and comforted her tenderly.

"Hit isn't fer me I'm thinkin', Dave." She choked a little and said no more. It was so impossible for her to make him see it as she did, or to understand what had so vaguely come to her. And yet now that she was living on the old place where she and her mother had suffered and striven blindly with evil, — now that she had begun to have aspirations, and to know the truly lovely things of life, even though her condition was immeasurably different from the conditions of the past, — now that her imagination had begun to picture what might be, the long vista of the years opened before her, and it seemed as if she were looking along two paths diverging into the future, gradually leaving the happy moment of the present far behind, one plunging into the same old life of degradation and horror, — how horrible only she could know, — and the other rising into the pure heights of the happiness she was now able to dream about, because of her awakened and enlightened perceptions. Now — she knew the way she must inevitably take.

Dave must not soothe her into a feeling of security.

There was no security as long as he continued in this business. She must make him understand and see what she saw; or if she could not do this, she must take the right road herself, even if she had to walk it alone in sorrow and tears. If the place were hers, she would be to blame if she were weak and allowed him to use it for wrong purposes, even if he could not understand. She must love him so that she could bear to hurt him. She wanted to go out and demolish the still and pour all the liquor in those jugs into the stream, and yet she knew that to force her way on him would never be the same as if he did of himself the right thing; but something she must do. Oh, she must — she must!

"When be you goin' down mountain again, Dave?"

"I don't 'low to go ontwel some o' them fellers down thar quit smellin' a'ter licker in honey jugs," he laughed.

"They neveh will quit, Dave. Hit's agin the law, what you doin'."

"Law nothin'. What do I keer fer th' law. Law kill good folks er lock 'em up fer life, an' leave bad folks live an' go free."

Now Lury thought she knew that this was so, and she had nothing to say, and yet she was sure there was a fallacy somewhere. There must be laws, and bad people must be punished. She felt the futility of argument with Dave, and she was not angry with him for differing with her, and he was so strong and assured that it was a comfort to lay her head on his breast and feel his arm around her. She put up her hand and touched his cheek. The dusk was close to them now, and the stars looked down on them. The scent of locust blossoms sifted through the air, honey

sweet. Within the house Danny slept, and the air was so still Lury could hear his soft breathing.

"What you thinkin' now, Lury? I know ye thinkin' something."

"I were thinkin' how happy I be weth you — jes' you an' Danny. Ef anything come to you, Dave — any bad thing — I — I'd die."

"Hain't any bad thing comin' to me. Quit thinkin' sech es thet. Look a here, Lury. Th' hain't anything on earth I wouldn't do fer you. I'll take keer o' myse'f fer you more 'n I would fer myse'f."

"Dave —" A sudden idea came to her. "Dave, would you 'low me do anything I pleased? Would you love fer me to? You say you 'd do a heap fer me — but would you 'low me to do? Would ye, Dave?"

"I'd 'low you do anything on earth you please — ef only ye'd take keer not to hurt Lury. Lury, she's my ol' woman." He laughed happily and held her closer, and she laughed also.

"Ye be good, Dave — ye be."

So for the time being Lury's fears were quieted. She had his promise that she might do whatever she pleased, and if there was no possibility of her bringing him to see the iniquity of his business, there was the thing she could do; only it would take courage, and no doubt he would be angry with her. The years that were past had begotten in her a desperate fear of anger. How often she had seen it — rage uncontrolled, terrible to meet! How often she had fled from it at her gentle mother's side, creeping out of the house into the darkness as the storm gathered, and hiding under the laurel on the hillside, lying all night on the

pine needles curled in her mother's arms, listening to the drunken riot of Bab and his helpers, and often of those who had gathered with him to gamble and drink.

Dave was different. Yes, and yet — she had seen him angry, but that was long ago. How could she, even for his own good, do anything to anger him? She shivered at the thought.

"Be ye cold, Lury?" He rose and they went in, and he closed the door behind them. The old house was a home now, and Lury was happy in it, — safe and warm and happy, but still with a brooding anxiety that would not let her be at peace.

CHAPTER XXXV

DAVE'S AWAKENING

As good as his word, Dave did not leave Lury again for several weeks. He stayed at home and cultivated his corn and her little garden patches, and she worked among her flowers and sang. Sometimes a neighbor came around the great boulder to the house, and they gossiped, for there were many mountain people scattered near and far who no longer avoided the place, now that Lury and Dave had transformed it into a veritable home.

"I be goin' down mountain, Dave," said Lury, coming out where he worked, standing waist high among the growing corn. "Do ye mind?"

"What ye goin' down mountain fer, whilst I be home? You knows I be skeered to be lef' here alone." He grinned, and then they both laughed. "I'll fetch Bess fer ye. What ye goin' fer?" He tossed his hoe aside and crossed over to her, and Lury stood by while he saddled the black mule. "She be jes' as fat an' shiny as when Dan'l keered fer her," said Dave with pride.

"She be," said Lury, with no less pride. "Miz Arl'nton were here whilst you were mind'n' still yestidy." Lury paused a moment; she hated even to mention the still, but she forced herself to do so. She had quite ceased to argue with Dave about it, and she tried to mention it naturally and as a matter of course. Yet her opposition

to it remained unshaken. This he knew, and the unspoken thought in the mind of each caused a certain restraint whenever the word was spoken. "Miz Arl'nton say Miss Peg be home. She come three or four days ago, an' I hain't seen her for a year. I have lef' a right good dinner fer you an' Danny, hot in th' ashes, kivered up good. You rake hit out an' eat, an' I'll be back to git supper right smart."

"I know ye will, Hon. Take keer o' Lury fer me, will ye, Bess?" He swung her lightly on to the old, high side-saddle and gave the mule's sleek hide a resounding slap. "What ye got in yer basket?"

"I put in some o' my posies an' leetle tricks to show Miss Peg what we a-doin' up here." She laughed and then flushed, and stooping down, she touched Dave's cheek lightly and rode away, looking back at him, her lovely face and wonderful eyes glowing from the recesses of her blue sunbonnet.

Bob Kitchel would have thought all this beauty wasted on the mountain man, but it was not. No man can stand still. He must either grow or deteriorate as the days pass, and Dave, being a healthy-minded, normal young man, was not deteriorating, in spite of the business he had elected to follow. The silence Lury had fallen into concerning it was a wise silence. She had said enough to work in his spirit like leaven, and he was stirred by the look in her eyes when they gazed steadily into his, when he knew she was thinking of him and loving him, and wishing with all her heart that he would cease doing the thing she hated.

"Wall, hit be a plumb shame, hit shore be, leavin' her here mos' ev'y week two days at a time, bein' scared and worrited

oveh me, thinkin' I mount be ketched, 'er sont to jail. She shore do think a heap o' me. What you think, Clip?" The dog stood at his side, making short dashes after her, and returning to leap up and coax for permission to follow. "You want to foller her? Wall, so do I, Clip. You go on, good dawg. Foller her, ef ye want to," and the dog dashed after her, passing her and splashing joyously through the ford ahead of her.

"Clip, I tol' you to stay weth Dave an' Danny," she said mildly, but he only replied with short, happy barks and ran on.

Dave stopped hoeing the corn and went out to the still and started up the fire under a great pot of fermented mash. He had refrained from doing this before that week, because of Lury, but since she was not there to be troubled by his occupation, he set to work eagerly to get as much done as possible before her return. Yet the leaven in his heart was working, for he was not happy in the labor. He was silent and looked grim. He returned to the house and carried his dinner out to the still and ate it there, he and Danny.

The food was good and well cooked, not like the heavy, sour, half-cooked bread he had often eaten there in discomfort, because he preferred to stay out of hearing of Ellen Furman's whining voice. It was the first time he had gone out to the still to eat since he and Lury were married. It was the first time Lury had ridden away and left him at home alone also. If she wished to ride to the Settlement, she went with him, or rode down while he was away. He thought it strange of her to go down this time, when he was staying at home just to be with her and not leave her alone. Dave shook his head dubiously as he sat there, replenishing the

fire from time to time, keeping the mash from scorching and the fire brisk.

And all the time as he watched the fire, and the fumes of the boiling mash filled the air around him, the leaven Lury had lovingly hid in his soul was working. He neither whistled nor sang, and the smoke of burning pine and the vapors from the caldron seemed redolent of memories and visions of the past. As the memories thronged upon him, and the visions shifted and hovered around the very spot where he sat, and the hearth where Lury cooked his meals, and the doorway where they two sat of evenings, the contrasts grew sharper and bolder between that old time and the present. He rose and strolled away to the caves, lingering to gaze at the store of old liquor Lee Bab had made. But the memories would not be shaken off, and the vision still haunted him.

His reasons, so plausible, for going on with this work, seemed all at once to lose their power and to teem with evil beginnings and evil endings. Bab's old still! How they used to sit around it and tell each other tales it was shameful to hear! How drunken they were! How stupid and ignorant! Why, even in his prison, he had learned to know that, as he never would had he never been sent there. He would have gone on and on and married Lury, and they would have become as those others were, — people set apart from their fellows because of their ways, and hiding their money after they had made it because they knew no decent ways of using it, grovelling in that home like hogs and sleeping in filthy, unmade beds, or crawling out on the corn-shucks beside the hog-pen to sleep in quiet away from the whining and quarreling and cursing. And Lury was think-

ing all these things and trying to keep him back from such a fate. No wonder her eyes were wistful, and her sweet lips quivered when she said: "Hit isn't fer me I'm thinkin', Dave."

He went back to the still and sat under the shed, so snugly hid among the rocks and behind the vines, and there he neglected the fire, and the mash burned, and then the flames went out and ashes gradually covered the glowing coals. Danny had gone back to the house, contented and happy, to play with two little hound pups Dave had given him, until, quite wearied out, he fell asleep beside the door in Lury's glowing bed of poppies, with the little dogs curled in his arms. Once only unsightly weeds were in that place, and the hogs made mud holes in which to wallow.

Dave walked restlessly back to the house and found the child there, and again the change struck him poignantly. "He a right putty leetle devil," he said. He paused in the door and gazed within. The hearth had been rubbed with white clay, clean and sweet enough to eat therefrom. The old mahogany bed had been polished, and the counterpane was white as snow and smoothly spread. Soft white curtains waved to and fro in the windows; the walls had been whitened; and a brown jug of honeysuckle stood against the blackened chimney, its white flowers and green vines trailing down and filling the room with their sweet scent. Dave went to the cupboard he had built for Lury beside the chimney and pushed back the curtains hung before it. There everything was as neat and clean as was the bed and the hearth.

He reached up to the top shelf, and from behind an old platter he drew a little painted box that had belonged to

Sally Cloud, where he knew Lury kept the money he had given her from time to time. It was full. He counted it and then drew from his pocket all he had, and rolled it tightly and packed it in the box with the rest. "Thar," he said; but it did not still his conscience to do this. Money would not buy her. She did not want the money he made in his way. And she sat at home, day after day, working, keeping everything like this — all for him — thinking — thinking — what was she thinking?

Now what was she gone down for? Was it really only to see Peg? She had said she was going to do something that would make him mad. What could it be? He turned from the cupboard and looked at the bed and then at the fireplace, and the tragedy of it all came over him anew. He knew what she was thinking. She was dreading the future; she was remembering the past. She knew the cause of all the tragedy, and she knew the same cause might bring it again. One woman alone could not avert it by waiting and praying, by covering up and denying. It was the evil thing — the deadly thing — and he was going against her and keeping on with the old business, the degrading, devil's brew he was making and selling to get money — and because he hated the law. Why — why was he doing it?

The old bitterness of his arrest on a false charge and the hours of lying there in his cell, waiting for the death to which he had been sentenced, and the thoughts he had struggled with then, with curses and hatred in his heart, surged over him. And even with them in his heart, he looked at the old bed and the face of the woman who had been all in all to him, mother — sister — friend — and guardian-angel in one — who had suffered more, far more, than ever he had been

made to suffer, appeared as he had last seen it, pale and still and sweet, and cold as marble. The spirit that had suffered and loved was gone, — where? Waiting, somewhere. Why had she suffered? He knew.

With bowed head he walked out of the door and steadily back to the still. There the fire was out, but the miserable caldron of mash was still warm, and the smell of it and of smouldering pine coals still hung in the air.

"I reckon I be'n thinkin', too," said Dave aloud, and the sound of his own voice in that silent place, where there were none to hear, roused him from his dream, and he laughed. Then he lifted his head, and looked up to the top of the great wall of rock that loomed above that spot where the store of liquor was kept, and laughed again. Suddenly he was glad. It seemed as if he had wakened from a bad dream, and yet it was not a dream. It was only what had been, all seen at once by an awakened soul.

"Wall, ol' still, I reckon you be done fer." He brought a shovel and began to cast sand and earth into the fireplace until it was filled. He packed it down with blows of the shovel and smoothed it over. Then he covered the great pot with boards. "Th' hawgs'll git this," he said. Then he began to tear up the copper worm, "Wall, I reckon this'll save me hev'n to git a new one." He smiled and ruggedly set to work. "I be goin' to do hit right, whilst I be about hit," he said, and beat the great hollow worm to a mass of flattened metal. With rocks as great as he could lift, he crushed it and tore it apart, and turned the heavy sheets over and piled them one on another, and still beat them down.

He worked with a sort of belligerent, joyous fury, like one

who had been a slave, and suddenly set free, was tearing up and destroying the tokens of his slavery. Then he turned on the short chimney of mortar and stone and began to batter it down. It was strongly built, and he worked until the perspiration streamed down his face, but at last it was done. He stood a moment gazing at the wreck he had made, then laughed again.

"Yo're done fer now, ol' Bab's still. I done fer ye." He took up his shovel and swung it over his shoulder, and rolling his over-alls above his knees, prepared to wade the stream that flowed under the boulder which had for so many years securely stood a barrier between Lee Bab and detection. As he forded the place, he thought that now, as there was no longer any need for such secrecy, he would make a bridge there and cultivate the hollow beyond, or do something with it, hardly knowing what, but realizing buoyantly the freedom of spirit created in him from no longer having anything to hide.

The sun was dropping below the hills, and the hollow was in purple shadow, as he waded the ford. Danny came running to him, and he lifted the child to his shoulder and bore him in triumph to the house, the small dogs leaping and scrambling after.

"Say, Dave. I be hongry."

"Ye be? What ye done weth all that dinner ye et, — all thet pie Lury done made ye?"

"Hit's gone."

"Gone? I reckon hit's gone. Mine be gone, too. Come on, now; you git th' fat sticks, an' we'll build th' fire fer Lury gin she gits home. She'll make supper fer we-uns." He put Danny down and carried in a great log for the back

of the fireplace, and arranged the sticks for lighting as the child brought them to him. "That's right. Danny knows how to he'p, don't ye, son? Now we'll carry Josephine to water, an' git th' stall ready fer Bess, and gin the mules ther corn, an' when sisteh come, she'll fin' we-all settin' here waitin' fer 'er."

The little one trotted happily after Dave wherever he went, as was his wont, and when all was done, they sat together in the house doorway, until they saw her guiding Bess around the boulder and across the yard. She rode bare-headed, and her eyes shone like stars. When she slipped down from the high saddle, she slid into Dave's arms.

"What you be'n up to, Dave? Ye look like ye be'n up to some devilment. You kissin' me like ye thought I be'n gone a year. You be'n up to somethin'; I c'n see hit in yer eyes."

"Oh, I be'n workin' 'roun' th' still, gitt'n' things done whilst ye were gone, so't ye wouldn't grum'le at me." He grinned, looking down at her, as her face fell. Then she lifted her eyes to his and smiled proudly.

"I don't guess ye be'n at sich es that. Ye look like ye seen somethin' good."

"Wall, I be lookin' at you — sech a ol' woman as you be — runnin' away whilst yer ol' man be home — Look 'roun' here. Cain't ye make oveh me a leetle?" He took her by the arm and turned her about as she walked away from him. "Be ye tired?"

"No. I don't believe ye be'n stillin'. Ye don't act like hit."

"Don't act like hit? Wall, you jes' wait till I put Bess

up, an' I'll show ye ef I be'n stillin'. Hit's the biggest day's work eveh I done 'roun' a still." He led the mule away, and then returned and took her again by the arm, leading her with him. "Don't go in the house thar ontwel I show ye." She went with him in silence, bracing herself to say what she ought to say, but not comprehending his strange manner, unless he had made some great discovery.

"I got to git yer supper, Dave."

"Aw, you come weth me first," he pled, and when they came to the ford, he lifted her in his arms and carried her through. "Neveh do to spile yer putty cloes," he said. "Whyn't ye w'ar this putty dress fer Dave oncet in a while."

"I will, Dave. Don't take me out there. I — you knows what I think."

"Yas, I know's what ye will think, too, when ye see what-all yer ol' man be'n doin'." He set her feet on the smooth, sliding rock, well out of the water. "Take keer, ye mount slip in. Hit's right slick." He caught her by the arm again and walked her along eagerly. "Look a thar now, will ye? Open yer eyes big; that's right. I 'low'd ye would. Look what I done to th' ol' copper worm? Hit were hard work doin' that, made me sweat. We'll sell hit fer ol' copper, an' maybe hit'll bring a leetle."

Lury stood looking at the wreck and complete ruin of the old still, speechless, white, and silent. Then she turned to Dave and held out both her arms. "Come, Dave. Come. I want to git my arms around ye. Dave, I love ye so." And Dave walked into her arms and sat on the edge of the still, holding her to his breast until she sobbed herself calm, clinging to him, her arms locked tight about his neck.

"Thar now, hush, Lury. I thought you'd laugh when ye

seed this. I neveh reckoned on you bein' so sorry to see the ol' still ruin't 'at ye'd cry this-a-way. Now you hush, an' I'll build hit up again."

"No ye won't, Dave. Ye be good. Ye be good, Dave. I love ye, Dave."

"Wall, now you be quare, when I done tore up all I hev to make ye a livin' weth."

"I hated hit so, Dave — hid'n' an' sneakin' like we have to in this 'er hell business. Dave, all the lyin' and the cussin' and the badness be done forever."

"Done an' buried, Lury. See th' grave I done made fer hit in th' holler whar the fire war?"

"Dave! I be so glad!"

"Lury, she be quare. When she be glad, she cry fit to kill. An' when she be sorry, she jes' set an' smile an' smile — like she don't keer fer nothin'."

"We don't have to care any more, Dave. We can walk whar we please an' carry our hades like we have nothin' to hide. I like sich es that."

"That's why I done hit. I set here thinkin', knowin' ye'd be glad. I done ye right mean, goin' agin ye like I done. My business be gone, but I reckon I c'n think o' things to do. — Heap o' things to do."

That evening, after Danny was sleeping, they sat late over the fire, talking of the past and what the future was to be for them. Lury told Dave about Peg, and the school, and how many things they were doing there. She said she was going down every week and keep on learning things.

"What ef ye have quit stillin'! I know a heap o' ways we c'n do. Miss Peg, she's having the girls to the school learn how to raise things, an' keep bees an' git honey to sell.

She 'low'd we c'd do sich as that. I brought up a book all about hit. You c'n make th' bee gums, an' I c'n look after 'em. I hain't skeered o' bees. You foolin' the officers weth yer honey — hit made me think o' Miss Peg and her bee rais'n'."

"I know two more bee trees I c'n git, an' tote honey in them jugs ev'y time I go down mountain. Thar's all the licker in th' cave I c'n sell — 'bouts a thousand dollars be hid'n there. Ef I sell all that, we'll set up here fine — like I seen places oveh to'ds Woodville. I'll git red o' that store o' licker first thing I do."

Lury sat a moment silent, her face set and her eyes looking off into the future. All that liquor yet to be sold. All to be distributed among people around and below them, bringing evil into their homes, perhaps death. Her spirit cried out against it. What could she do? She sat listless, remote from him, thinking her own thoughts as she had done so often since they were married. Dave recognized the mood and dreaded it.

"Tired, be ye? I reckon so. Ye betteh git to bed an' sleep."

"Hain't the' no way ye c'n git red o' that licker in th' cave? Cain't ye pour hit out in the branch, er something?"

"Lury! Be ye crazy? That's — hit's yore inheritance! Hit's a heap o' money. Cain't th'ow that all away. Ye betteh git to bed."

Then Lury raised her head and laughed. "You think I goin' to pitch hit in th' branch to-night? No, Dave. I be goin' to show ye somethin', an' then, ef ye want to th'ow hit away, ye kin." She found the little basket she had carried down on her arm in the morning, and sat beside him with it

on her knees. "Look a-here, Dave." She lifted one small article after another, which had been neatly packed in it. "I has to sew all these. Miss Peg, she he'p'd me cut them out. Hain't this sof' an' white an' fine? What-all you reckon this'll be?"

Dave drew his chair closer to her and stooped over the soft white things, his cheek against hers, and touched them gently with his fingers, while she talked on. "Paw have be'n sent to jedgment, an' I be goin' to 'low his memory lie quiet, but you have decided what-all to do weth th' still paw left, an' I reckon I c'n leave you tend to the rest, cain't I, Dave?"

She said no more, and Dave, his cheek against hers, and his hand lying on the soft white heap of dimity and muslin in her lap, said softly in her ear the things she wanted to hear him say.

"Our chil'en's inheritance is goin' to be clean, Lury. Th' still be ruined an' buried this day, an' to-morrer morning ev'y drap of thet hell brew'll be runnin' down th' branch, an' you c'n fill them jugs an kaigs plumb full o' yer honey." So they sat, her hand in his, over the soft white goods in Lury's lap, his cheek against hers, the past behind them, and the light of the long future in their eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVI

DANIEL COMES HOME

A YEAR had passed when Peg returned to the Settlement. Barney did not care where they made their home, if only he had his Peg with him. What did it matter, so long as she found happiness in her daily life? As for him, he must go hither and thither, anyway, while he made his own way. Therefore, when she elected to build them a home on a hilltop, overlooking the long reaches of the low country on the one side, and the blue hills she so loved on the other, he gladly consented.

So there Peg built her home and spent the inheritance left her by her thrifty ancestors in helping and forwarding the work of the school. She was not without her moments of gratefulness to them for this that the world called hers, but her real joy was in seeing good grow out of it all, and the redemption of that little spot of the earth in which she had chosen to establish her garden of girls.

All summer long the work of her building went on, and the changing of the raw, unkempt hillside round about into garden and grassy spaces and hedgerows and fountain, — and the wild wood behind her into open, or deeply shaded forest glades, where the dead and worthless things were cleared away, and the wholesome, growing things were left to take their own courses toward beauty, uncurbed and fully developed.

In Peg's garden of girls the same pruning and clearing away of dead and worthless things was going on, and the same conservation of the loveliest and the best, and the same open way made for beauty of all sorts to grow and naturally develop.

Elizabeth Graves often said: "All these girls need is to have the way to God's sunlight and the hilltops of life cleared and made possible for them, and they will turn to it as naturally as flowers turn to the sun."

She was mostly right, — at least she was right in her optimism, — and the development of Lury Bab went far toward proving her theory correct. All that had really been done for Lury had been to make it possible for her to give unboundedly of her love. Through this, she had grown and blossomed spiritually, and so, in the Almighty's own way, following the highest yearnings of the heart and finding them fruitful, she had also led the stumbling feet of David Turpin out into the open spaces where only hope and aspiration and love lay between him and the sky.

What those great-minded and simple sisters had done for the Settlement, thus indirectly bringing about the highest happiness for themselves and Peg, — Lury was doing for her little spot on the mountain-side. It was more than reading and writing and arithmetic that had been learned by Lury and Dave. They still spoke in their ungrammatical and purely mountain vernacular, but as Daniel McEwen had said once to David: "It's how a man thinks 'at makes him good or bad," and he might well have added that the deepest wisdom comes not always with correct verbal expression.

Dave was as good as his word. The next day after de-

molishing the old still, he and Lury took their way out to the caves, and there he brought Lury, one after the other, those jugs of liquor which he had long looked upon as so much coined gold. One by one she poured their contents into the stream and set them back on the rock, empty. She laughed to hear it gurgle out of the narrow-mouthed jugs and chattered merrily to Dave as he sat on a fallen log and watched her throw away their wealth, as counted by dollars. "I like to hear hit go," she said. "Hit killed my maw, and hit nigh wore my soul out, waitin' an' fearin' fer what might come to you, Dave, an' bein' skeered lest Danny take to drink, an' — Dave — I be'n skeered lest you mount tech hit yerse'f. I hev. Ev'y time you come home, my heart jes' stood cl'ar plumb still when you'd kiss me, fer fear I mount smell hit off'n ye. An' — Dave — when I neveh did, I used to go off by myse'f and git down on my knees and thank Gawd ye were good. An' Dave — when ye went down mountain weth hit, I uset to pray Gawd ye mount keep good — ontwel one day I jes' thought hit weren't keepin' good to make hit an' sell hit an' ruin men an' make women git to be like Ellen Furman. I declar I put' nigh come down here an' busted ev'ything up the day I thought that out."

"Why didn't ye? Hit'd 'a' sarved me right."

"No, hit wouldn't 'a' sarved ye right. Gawd neveh do we-uns that-a-way. He leave us do right fer ourselves. Dave, ef I had o' busted things up this-a-way, like I wanted to, and like I put' near done, you know what?"

"I reckon I do know." He laughed shamefacedly.

"I reckon I know, too." She went over and sat beside him. "I reckon hit 'd 'a' sarved me right, too."

"What would I 'a' done?"

"I don't reckon you'd 'a' cussed me out, like ye mount 'a' done once, but you'd 'a' come out here an' built hit all up again, and thar I'd 'a' be'n jes' like I were before, ashamed o' our livin', and wishin' I were dead, 'fore — 'fore —"

"Ye be plumb right. But, Lury, I tell ye our chil'en be goin' to have a clean inheritance's fer's we kin make hit."

"Dave, le's we lay these jugs in th' branch an' leave the water run th'ough 'em, and when we hev l'arn't good how to do, we'll fill 'em plumb full o' honey, like you done that day, — let's do that, Dave."

So together, like two children playing in the stream, they placed those mountain-made jugs among the stones, where they would be safe, and where the clear mountain water would fill them and run over them, and then took their way to the house and counted the money they had to depend on until Dave could find other work to do, or raise enough to sell for their daily needs.

They had no trouble, and it was not long before he learned there were other ways of earning money, — free, happy ways. He whistled about his work all day long. In spite of his years of apprenticeship to evil, he was not depraved. His promise to Sally Cloud, so long kept, had saved him. Peg recognized this when she rode up to see Lury. She sent her gardener up to help them decide what to do with their small patches of good soil, and when she came in July, the old orchard was green with rye and purple with vetch. The old sucker-grown apple-trees had been trimmed and cleaned of disease and insects, and the big black-heart cherry-trees were loaded with fruit.

She sent Dave down to the Settlement for one or two of the girls there, and for jars in which to put their jam and preserves, and he returned with a wagon-load of happy faces, and Elizabeth with them. It was a gay company that turned to and preserved those cherries, and the work was well done. Such a happy event had never occurred before at the Cove. In the old days, all who gathered there came to gamble and riot and drink, and often the gatherings ended in a shooting, or in debauchery revolting and shameful. The women never came. Sally had lived her life there without women's help or sympathy. But now it was different. Flowers and fruit and happy girls' faces, singing and laughter, and after all were gone, — Dave — and love. And the past? Only a dream, but alas, a dream unforgetable.

The summer passed, and the autumn passed, and the winter came. All went well with Lury and Dave, and all went well at the school, but Daniel McEwen still sat in his prison and lived over the days that were gone. He did not confess it to Richard Hadley, but in his heart he had hoped he might be pardoned. The hope had kept him up and given him a spot of light toward which to look. But as the lingering days passed, and the pardon did not come, he lost hope, and the light gradually died out of his face.

Peg and Barney motored down to the banker's home one day in the fall, and Bob was there. At dinner the fate of Daniel McEwen became the subject of conversation, and Barney and Bob exclaimed with surprise that nothing had been accomplished toward securing a pardon for him.

"What is the matter?" cried Peg. "Isn't there any one interested in him enough to work for it? Then I will. I'm interested in him. I should think —"

Richard Hadley spoke gravely. "So should I, Peg. It isn't that no one cares, but there is a certain amount of self-interest in everything of that sort that has to be taken into account. The right of pardon is a thing a man in power has to use with caution. It is something he can't afford to throw away."

"But I should think if the governor knew that he was innocent, he'd —"

"There's right where it is. He knows Daniel McEwen is not innocent. He can't toss out pardons from a clear sky to men who, by their own confession, are guilty, to have his acts and motives taken up and used as grist, to get him defeated by the party opposed to him at the next election. It will take a regular campaign to pardon Daniel McEwen. I've been personally to see the governor about it. He said he could not do so, unless he could have reasons that would stand investigation before the public. He was afraid of being accused of abuse of power."

"Is he up for reëlection?" said Barney.

"He will be."

"You can do something, Barney — I'm sure you can," said Peg. "You are not an Irishman for nothing. I remember how Barney made Comp Ross clear a lot of patent medicine drugs off his shelves, — made him jump to do it."

Barney broke into a laugh. "I have cause to remember that. I did do something of the sort once, but this needs different handling. There is a way of doing it, though."

"We'll all work on it," said Bob. "I would have done something before, if I'd known there was any difficulty."

"There's always difficulty when it comes to dealing with men who are actuated by self-interest," said Richard Hadley. "They make promises easily and slip out of them like eels."

"We'll make him see that it's for his own good and the success of his party that that man gets a pardon, and that right quick," said Bob.

"There's nothing pending just now," said Barney.

"No, that's why I've dropped it for the present."

"Well, this is the time not to drop it, Uncle Dick. Make him see that if he does it now, he will never be accused of working for self-interest and assure him it will work up well when the right time comes. It will make good campaign talk if he does it for some great and benevolent reason, and not just at the time when it will gain him votes. We can convince the governor — you can, Uncle Dick, that it will make the best kind of campaign talk."

"I think Daniel McEwen was the finest figure on the mountain. We all did at the school. Can't you get up a petition? I'll sign it. We all will," cried Peg.

Her husband smiled indulgently. "You forget, dear. Your signature means everything on a bank check but nothing on a petition."

Peg caught her lower lip between her teeth, and was silent, but her eyes and the flush on her cheek were eloquent.

"How long are you going to stay in this part of the world, Bob?" asked his friend.

"As long as there is a thing for me to do, worth while," said Bob wearily.

"Well, I'm going to stay by for a time, too. We'll work up a giant petition that will make the governor of this State sit up and take notice. You and I will canvass the mountain, not personally, but through those who have influence with the people here. We know who they are, and you can take care of those who come in range here at the bank, Mr. Hadley. McEwen has friends all over the mountains, and the same vote that put him in the legislature will take him out of prison. All they need is to coöperate and set the ball rolling."

The two young men went at the matter in earnest, and Dave Turpin greeted them with joy, when they came to him. He took the petition to his friends, and they to their friends, and the news spread. From hand to hand the paper went, and names were signed in pencil, or here and there by a cross in the midst of the letters, but what matter? Every name placed there was the name of a voter, whether the owner of it could spell it, or write it in his own hand or not. Every one of those names would count as a power for or against the man to whom the petition was presented.

The fall had merged into winter when at last the matter was taken to the governor, and no one on the mountain doubted its efficacy. The great potentate took it in his hand and glanced casually over the long line of names, and then in Richard Hadley's face. The humorous lines at the corners of the banker's eyes deepened, but he did not smile, as the governor cleared his throat and smoothed his cleanly shaven chin before speaking. Also, before speaking, he crossed the floor to his secretary's desk and laid the list on top of the other documents awaiting attention, saying in his ear:

"Just glance over these names and find out how many of them are voters and what influence they have, — at your leisure — at your leisure." Then he returned to the banker and assured him that the matter would claim his earliest and most careful attention, and that the interest taken in the man by Mr. Hadley was enough to make him consider granting a pardon, even without the petition.

Then other matters were discussed, and Richard Hadley took his leave, wisely refraining from reminding the affable governor that he had twice before approached him on that very subject without the backing of such a list as he now brought, and that not the slightest notice had been given his request.

"Well, this is what government by the people means, I suppose," he remarked to himself as he left the Presence.

But evidently the matter was taken under consideration, as the governor promised, and for value received in the way of personal influence later on, that splendid prerogative of the power of extending mercy was sold by the man who held the power, and the pardon was at last granted.

It was indeed well that it came when it did, and it came none too soon. When hope sifted slowly like the running sands in an hour-glass out of Daniel's heart, he began to droop, apparently without cause, and his splendid strength gave way before the thought of a futile life for the rest of his days — a mere existence. He was slipping away because he did not care to stay. The friends who came to take him from his prison found him pallid and weary, lying on his cot, waiting for nothing and interested in nothing. He had given up.

These friends were the banker, Bob Kitchel, and Barney

O'Harrow. When last the two younger men saw Daniel, he was standing in his own doorway, waving a courteous farewell, as they motored away. They had brought their little car through devious ways on a wager with him that yet they would motor into his door-yard, and they had done so.

The wager had been paid in a dinner such as that he had once given them after their first day's tramp with him, and he had paid it with interest, rejoicing that they had won and that he had the privilege of thus extending hospitality to his own liking. He was a gallant figure then. Now he did not even seem to care to stand erect. He took the news they brought him listlessly. It was pitiable. Their eyes filled, as they saw him lying there in his striped clothing.

His old humor did not desert him, however, when he was at last seated in the car and saw the town receding from him and the open spaces of the country stretching before him. He turned to those friends and smiled his old smile.

"I reckon I hev had 'bout all the city life I keer fer."

"I reckon so, McEwen. We would have shortened your stay long ago, but it took these two young men to put a pry under that potentate at the capital before we could secure his attention."

"Wall, most ev'y man has his price. I reckon he thought he hed them to serve as could do more fer 'im 'an I could."

"It was a big political game of High-low-Jack, and he was 'not on.' When we showed him by practical demonstration you were his best card, — that you swung the whole mountain vote, and that without this pardon his political career was ended, his signature went across that paper with a grand, magnanimous sweep."

Daniel's back stiffened, and his head lifted, but he said

nothing more on the subject except to moralize a little. "I hev l'arnt a leetle myse'f, settin' thar. One thing be' 'at no matter how big a man know he be, he'll find 'at th' Almighty be bigger'n he is. I quit thinkin' 'bouts a pardon an' plumb give up. Hit looked like I'd betteh think 'bouts straightenin' my 'counts fer th' nex' worl'. Wall — Gawd know 'at I hed something to do — but He hev gin me a leetle mo' time."

Arrived in Woodville, they found Dave there, leading Bess. "Lury say she want ye to take the mule back. She want me to thank ye fer th' loan of her all this time. She hev used her a right smart heap."

The meeting between Dave and Daniel was full of intense but restrained feeling. They looked in each other's eyes, and the look said more than words. Dave was shocked at his old friend's appearance of age and weariness, but he thought he covered the shock with smiles and indifferent words. Daniel felt it and was touched, but he covered his love for the young man with the same smiling nonchalance.

"I reckon Bess'll hate it, comin' back to a ol' man, 'stead o' Lury. Howdy, Bess? She be slick an' fine. I'm feared ye done 'er too well. She'll be honin' fer you an' Lury. 'Les'n you be up to my ol' place, like I tol' ye to be."

"Naw," said Dave sheepishly. "You knows we be up at th' Cove, — fer you done fer Lury what I'd ought to 'a' done, ef I hadn't be'n a plumb fool." Then he looked up in Daniel's face with a smile. "Lury an' me, we be'n up thar to yore place oncet in a while, an' we hev made a gyarden fer ye, an' ye'll fin' Josephine thar in th' lot, weth a leetle heifer calf. I carried 'em both up early this mawnin'."

Now Daniel had nothing to say for a moment, while he

swallowed and smiled and looked at the younger man. Finally he asked after Lury.

"Lury, she right peart an' putty. She settin' up thar swingin' in a rockin'-cheer, hold'n' the puttiest leetle gal in 'er arms eveh you see. She tell me to say to ye 'at she'll be up yon' to see ye right quick."

Daniel said nothing more, but stood with his arm across Dave's shoulder, while his eyes glistened and his lips twitched, until he could master them, and the old smile played around them and twinkled in his eyes. Then he slowly mounted, throwing his leg across the mule's back stiffly.

"Wall, you tell Lury fer me 'at I'll try to stick on this mule as fer as th' Settlement, an' thar I'll stop to see widder Basle an' then go on up mountain, an' as soon as I c'n look after Josephine an' git to feel myse'f agin, I'll come to 'er. Tell 'er I'm honin' to see 'er putty eyes, will ye?"

"Let me take you up in the car, won't you?" said Bob eagerly, seeing how weakly he drooped as he started off. But Daniel refused and rode away alone. He preferred to be alone. The long loneliness and silence of the prison was on him, and he was oppressed by his strenuous emotions. An eagerness for the hills had seized him, and he did not stop at the Settlement as he had intended, but rode on and on, drinking in the sweet air and the odors of the hills.

Once again the spring was marching up their slopes, and he passed the gradations of bloom from their base to their tops, as he had done season after season through many succeeding years. As he neared the top, he swayed and reeled in the saddle as he had done many a time in the past, but now he swayed and clung through weakness,

for although they had stopped for refreshment at the hotel, Daniel had touched no liquor. He had taken his last drink and was glad it was so.

It was scarcely mid-day when Dave left Woodville, riding one of his own mules. He knew how it would be, and that Daniel might prefer to ride alone, and he hurried back to Lury at the Cove. There he found her prepared to ride on up to the top of Old Abe with him in the wagon.

"Dave, I be ready to stay over night. He mount want us to stay." She stood by the wagon, holding her babe in her arms and smiling at him through tears. "Mrs. Basle came up whilst you were gone. She drove the Deals' mule, an' a boy took hit back, an' she'll stay an' keer fer Danny ontwel we get back. She come to tell me what she'd ought to 'a' told me long ago, but on'y she thought mebby Dan'l M'Cune mount want to tell hit hisse'f. Dave, one time Dan'l loved my maw, but somebody lied on 'im, an' she lef' 'im, but he neveh quit lovin' 'er — not even when Lee Bab took 'er. I'll go up thar an' lay leetle sis in his arms, — fer, Dave, — we have named her a'ter maw." Lury spoke in an awed voice.

Dave stood still in astonishment. "An' he neveh tol' me a thing the hull endurin' time I were thar! Gawd! Lury, I'm glad. I has a heap o' respect fer Dan'l M'Cune. Wall! Hit 'counts fer — a — heap o' things." Dave hastened about, getting his team "hooked up" to their canvas-covered wagon, and they started.

When Daniel arrived at his cabin, he was too weary to do more than throw himself on his bed and sleep. It was growing late in the day when he woke and noted the things that had been done to welcome him home. He sat up and

gazed about him. Yes, surely there had been a woman's touch there. White curtains hung at his little windows. The hearth had been cleaned with white clay, and the mantel held a brown jug of flowers like Lury's own, and their fragrance filled the room.

He rose and walked unsteadily about, and pulled back the white cloth that had been hung in front of his shelves, that used to stand open. There everything was placed in order, as Lury placed her own dishes. A few pretty ones had been added, and there was a platter of fried chicken, a loaf of white bread, light and delicately brown, and a pat of fresh butter, while in his brown pitcher was buttermilk. He turned toward the hearth and found sweet, fragrant corn-bread in a pan, covered with hot ashes.

"Wall, I reckon I has folks o' my own, an' I reckon, even ef we do be sinners, Gawd A'mighty do rule the world."

Still he did not touch the savory things. His heart ached, and he was lonely. He remembered a time when he had looked forward to having one with him who would keep his cabin thus. "Ef I had 'a' know'd. Gawd! Ef I had 'a' know'd." He said the words over softly to himself and touched the white counterpane as he passed on his way to the door. Standing there, he lifted his eyes to the crag and noted the eagles' nest. "Yas, thar they be," he said; then he saw the covered wagon creeping slowly up the steep ascent toward him. Lury's smiling face looked out from under the great white hood, and as he saw them, his old strength seemed to return to him. He threw up his head and walked out to meet them like a king. He lifted Lury down in his arms and held her tenderly and kissed her. He knew she had been told and was glad.

"Seem like I has folks," he said.

"I wanted you to see sis. She be named fer maw," said Lury, and then suddenly her arms went about his neck, and she burst into tears. "I loved ye first time eveh I saw ye," she said.

"Bide happy, child, bide happy. Hit's all right now, Hon. Hit's all right now."

Dave came around and took the babe in his own arms. "Hit's Lury's way. Ef she be right happy, she boun' to cry, but ef things go wrong, she laugh an' make out she don' keer. Women is quare, — an' here's leetle Sally, she's another on 'em to grow up an' laugh when she'd oughter cry, and cry when she'd oughter be a-laughin'." He lifted the covering from the baby's head and held the little thing up proudly for Daniel to see. Two great, wondering eyes looked up into his. "Hain't she peart? Look now."

And Daniel looked, then took the little one from Dave's arms and carried her into his house himself. Poignantly Lury remembered the touch and curve of those long, slender hands, as once they held and comforted her baby brother. She could never forget.

Daniel seated himself beside the whitened hearth, still holding the babe. "You take cheers an' set, an' make yorese'fs at home. I found I had folks when I got up here, and I'll admire to share my supper weth ye. Dave, I hev l'arnt a heap back yon', an' one thing be 'at we may go th'ough a heap o' trouble, but hit's trouble o' our own making mostly, an' afteh all's done, somehow good do come out, an' Gawd do rule an' overrule. We-uns may stir up a heap o' trouble fer ourse'fs, but Gawd A'mighty do rule."

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